ISSN No. 0974-035X

An Indexed, Refereed & Peer Reviewed Journal of Higher Education

Towards Excellence

UGC-HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE,
GUJARAT UNIVERSITY, AHMEDABAD, INDIA

**EVALUATING SYLLABUS OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS FROM DEGREE
ENGINEERING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE**

Mr. Bhaveshkumar Bipinchandra Rana

&

Dr. Seema R. Gida

Abstract:

“We have received complaints from recruiters highlighting lack of communication skills among students.....even if knowledge of English language improves in students, be they from Gujarat or other states, proficiency continues to be a problem.”

-Dr. Ketan Kotecha,
Former Director of Institute of Technology,
Nirma University, Ahmedabad

Focusing on the above statement quoted from an interview article, one can not overlook the globalised importance of English Language which has generated the demand to develop good communication skills irrespective of any particular field or a profession. Perceiving the importance of good communication skills in the modern era, each technological university designs its syllabus with a purpose to sharpen the communication skills of “would be” engineers. In the above scenario, we cannot ignore the fact that the majority of students admitted in engineering and technology courses in the State are from non-English. Thus, it requires a great care on the part of syllabus preparers to design a syllabus not only keeping in mind these learners but also the expectation of industry. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the current syllabus of Communication Skills prescribed by Gujarat Technological University for first year engineering students on the basis of responses of the students who have been taught this syllabus. An attempt will also be made to suggest measures to deal with limitations of the syllabus if discovered any in the study.

Introduction

Michael Eisner is credited with leading the Walt Disney Corporation out of financial decline to become the media empire it is today. He believes that

“today communication requires a new set of skills, skills that today’s students are equipped to elevate in the 21st century”.

The presence and importance of English language in the modern technical Education has been the topic of discussion among the researchers in this era of globalization. Not only technical education but the other disciplines (be they technical or non technical) have also accepted the inevitability of English language. English language is taught as “Communication Skills” - a compulsory subject in degree engineering colleges affiliated to Gujarat Technological University in Gujarat. It’s the time when the engineering students need to develop effective communication skills to perform better in academics as well as in their career ahead. As English is preferred medium of communication in higher studies and business (employment), English Language teaching at the undergraduate level has to be more planned and implemented effectively in technical education. This study does not deny the fact that the present syllabus of communication skills offered by Gujarat Technological University is set to achieve that standard but this study is conducted to know what the students themselves feel about this syllabus after they have studied CS in the first year. The students are the beneficiaries and they can better tell what they have achieved through this syllabus of communication skills. Thus, this study is conducted to know the perspective and reactions of the students on the syllabus they have studied.

The present syllabus of Communication Skills in all the Engineering Colleges of Gujarat affiliated to Gujarat Technological University (GTU) is designed to cater the needs of technical students to develop their inter-personal and professional communication skills effectively. It is likely to meet students’ expectations as per present and future needs of language skills. It also tries to concentrate on four basic language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing). While designing the evaluation format, the syllabus designers must have kept in mind these skills. Reference books containing the topics of the syllabus have also been prescribed. Teachers of these technical institutes also attend the trainings of ELT to sharpen their teaching skills and providing best language practice to their students. In spite of the efforts made by all stakeholders, the engineering students can not communicate effectively in English Language as a part of their academics and professional life. This is what motivated the researchers to conduct this study with a purpose to discover the factors that students feel to be heeded with reference to present syllabus.

Literature Review

Infosys (2015) website states that

“Some of the skills that are essential for entry level employee include skills involved in using English effectively at workplace covering reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary and grammar, communication skills, adaptability to cross cultural environment, creative thinking and problem solving IT companies define the entrants to be industry ready when they possess these skills.”

Sageev P. Romanowski (2001) points out that though the technical competency is what is required and taught in the Faculty of Engineering, it seems that it should be accompanied by communication. The comments by US graduate engineers, employed for three to five years in industry and engineering sectors are quite illuminative

“An engineer is only as good as his ability to communicate his ideas”

“There are a lot of good technical minds in the workplace, but very few that communicate effectively”

“Technical abilities are a given; communication and leadership differentiate”

“A bad presenter is career limited”

Albert P'Rayan (2011) observes that

“Multinational corporations (MNCs) and major information technology (IT) companies in India recruit engineering candidates who have good English communication skills. In this highly competitive society, proficiency in English is considered one of the employability skills. In other words, English language skills are considered ‘life skills’ or ‘survival skills’ in the twenty-first century.”

Rierner, M.J. (2002) emphasizes that Engineering exercises need to incorporate oral and written communication skills throughout the curriculum and include presentation and communication as part of the marking process.

M. Mojibur Rahman (2010) taught for four years of experience at Indian School of Mines and has been dealing with oral communication skills courses 2005 onwards. He states that, though ISM students come from all over India cracking Joint Entrance Examination conducted by Indian Institute of Technology, the Oral Communication Skills Course was offered as an elective course in the third semester B. Tech. which demonstrates the importance of oral communication skills for engineering students.

Keane, A. and Gibson, I.S. (1999) points out that ineffective and poor written communication in engineering workplaces was found to lead to misinterpretation, inefficiency and time wastage, thereby adversely affecting problem solution. Such miscommunication was then found to contribute to mistrust and aggression, as well as appear unprofessional and be unproductive

Rationale of the Study

The researcher (Author 1) has been teaching Communication Skills in one of the colleges affiliated to Gujarat Technological University and has the first hand experience of developing the communication skills of degree engineering students as per the current syllabus. It is his close observation that even after the execution of the present syllabus in the suggested time scheme / slots through Lectures and Laboratory classes, it is very difficult to achieve the objectives defined in the course outcome of the syllabus. The researcher also discovered the same reaction of Dr. S C Sahasrabunde, The Director, DAIICT, Gandhinagar when he made a statement in an interview with DNA,

“The broken English often acts as a hurdle for them as a professional.”

Subjects and Design of the study

The students of Government Engineering College who have already studied this syllabus in their first year were selected as the sample for the study. A questionnaire is designed to find out their perceptions about the effectiveness of the syllabus of Communication Skills with reference to their experience in the subject. Questions were asked to discover whether the course outcome had been achieved through the prescribed syllabus or not. Reactions of the students will be analysed and interpreted.

Hypothesis

The current syllabus of Communication Skills in the colleges affiliated to Gujarat Technological University falls short to cater the language needs of the students and therefore does not achieve the course outcome set as a whole.

Findings and Discussion

1. As a reaction to the first question 71% students think that the present syllabus of “Communication Skills” can not help them develop their listening skill. It’s just because they may have the chance to listen to the teacher of English in Communication skills class (Lecture / Lab) only. That is while teaching / explaining theoretical concepts. There are 2 hours of lectures and 2 hours of Lab per week. The time allotted to communication skills is not enough to provide the enough opportunities for listening. Whether the technical teachers speak English in teaching their subjects is another point of study and if they use English in classroom, the quality again is a matter of discussion.
2. 89% of the students deny that the present syllabus can develop their speaking skills. It’s again because teacher has to explain the concepts and activities prescribed in the syllabus and are not able to give enough opportunities to speak in the classroom due to limited time factor.

3. On reading skill and writing skill, 51 % and 67 % students agreed that this syllabus can develop their reading and writing skills respectively as reading and writing are the skills that they have been practicing a lot during their study right from their school days.
4. On replying the question regarding the evaluation of listening and speaking as a part of internal or external examination, 74% and 84% students accepted the fact that there are no examination for evaluating the listening and speaking skill respectively in any form. Sometimes students tend to ignore the topics or content or skills that are not evaluated in examination. (Major Reason)
5. On investigating about the time that they get to speak in a lecture, average time is hardly 1 to 2 minutes and that is also not in all the lectures.
6. On investigating about the time that they get to speak in a lab (2 hours), the average time is hardly 3-4 minutes and that is also not in all labs as the students stated that there is nothing to speak when they are assigned writing tasks like letter writing, report writing, story completion etc.
7. 86% of the students agreed that the syllabus is more theoretical than the practical. (Skills can be developed only through practice – Less time squeezed for language practice)
8. The students were asked to tick mark the activities from the given list (Role Play, Telephonic Conversation, Dialogue practice, Presentation, Group Discussion , Listening Practice, Picture Description, Story Completion, Letter Writing, Report Writing, Email Writing, Phonetics Practice) which they have practiced for more than one time in lecture or lab.
Role Play : 2 times(Once in Bridge Course and second time in Lab) 34%
Group Discussion (Once in Bridge Course and second time in Lab) 27%
Writing, Report Writing, Email Writing : 87% (asked in examination)
9. 92 % students wanted to include the grammar topics in the syllabus. It is just because the students still believe that their speaking skill can only be developed if they can master the grammar skills. They have the fear of getting wrong in their use of language.
10. When asked about the topics they would like to include in the syllabus, they suggested “Tenses, Words and phrases used in day today life, use of grammar in routine language, Vocabulary for different occasions, Interview Skills, Listening Lessons, exam for listening and speaking like TOFEL Test”
11. 66% of the students believe that the current syllabus of communication skills can not help / teach them to use English Language at their job / work place. They admit that they had the practice of writing business letters, emails, report writing, paragraph writing and story completion as a part of syllabus. So the written communication may be handled anyhow even if they had practiced only once. But they also drew the attention that There are the topics like Group Discussion, Presentation, Telephonic Conversation, Role play etc. but these are only fruitful when they can practice it consistently for a longer period of time.
12. 79% of the students believe that the current syllabus of communication skills can not help / teach them to use English Language in their real life situation. The reason behind this

reaction may be that the communication in the class and lab is generally on the topic given the syllabus. There is no real life situations given and even if they are given, they are given for only once or twice to practice (as teachers have to discuss other topics from the syllabus too in the allotted lectures.)

13. 91% students are of the opinion that communication skills should not be only in the first semester but also in the other semesters. Rests were not sure about it.

14. When they are further asked about in which semesters Communication Skills should be kept, 57% of the students are of the opinion that it should be in 1st and 8th semesters. 34 % student suggested that it should be in 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th semesters.(i.e. every year) They may want to practice it in each year as they have understood the fact that Communication Skills are essential.

15. On asking if any topic to be removed from the syllabus Majority were unable to decide what to remove but still few suggested to remove Phonetics.

16. Replying to whether “Any changes you would like to make in the present syllabus...” they reacted

“The syllabus can be made more practical and more importance should be given to speaking English in class”

“Practical matter should be included”

“I will be more convenient if more n more lectures to listening and speaking only”

17. Last question was about the time allotted to communication skills lectures. 80% opine that the time is not enough. Some suggested 3 to 4 lectures and 4 hours Lab is required for developing effective communication skills of students.

“I will be more convenient if more n more lectures to listening and speaking only”

20% students were satisfied with the time allotted and one of them suggested,

“Time is enough just the need is to do management and use of it.”

Conclusion

Findings of the study support the set hypothesis that the current syllabus of Communication Skills in the colleges affiliated to Gujarat Technological University falls short to cater the language needs of the students and therefore does not achieve the course outcome set as a whole.

Suggestions (with reference to the reactions of the students and current syllabus)

1. English Language should be taught in context rather than dealing with aspects of language in isolation. Real Life Language Use should be incorporated and practiced through syllabus. The use of English language in the world of engineers should be focused.

2. The students have been practicing writing and reading skills as school level. Attempt should be made to concentrate more on developing speaking and listening skills in the syllabus of higher education.
3. Teachers' training for school level English Teachers should also be organized regularly to guide them about developing listening and speaking skill of the students consciously at school level which would surely help students gaining confidence in using English Language.
4. At University level, trainings and workshops should be arranged for English Teachers frequently for updating them with new tools and techniques for developing communication skills of the students.
5. While pursuing B.E. for eight years, they study communication skills in either first or second semester (in the first year) only. When he/she reaches to eighth semester he forgets what he was taught in the subject. In the eighth semester, he/she may appear in the campus interview through training and placement cell of the college. The communication skills practice must be extended up to the last semester / year of B.E. It's just because skill can only be developed through continuous practice / exposure. (it is recommended by students too.)
6. The Lab hours for practicing language should be increased.
7. There should be continuous evaluation of Speaking and Listening skills of the students in each semester keeping in mind some specific vocabulary, content and sentence structures that we want them to be acquainted with. There should be prescribed rubrics by the university used for noting / recording the development of Language skills in schools and colleges.
8. Student must be provided with more opportunities to practice language in the classroom and labs.
9. Other technical teachers can also be requested to try using only English Language in their teaching.
10. English teachers should talk more and more about English Language to motivate and encourage students to use English Language in their regular life to overcome their fear of committing mistake.
11. Use of Mobile phones for English Language Teaching effectively.

Scope for Further Study

The findings of this study can be taken into consideration while updating / designing the content of the syllabus for B.E. students next time. Further research can be carried out to know teachers' perspective for the same factors which would equally be useful in preparing the syllabus for degree engineering students.

References

1. Albert, P'Rayan. "*Engineering English: A Critical Evaluation*", Ph.D. Dissertation, 11 November 2011, retrieved from www.languageinindia.com retrieved on 19 March 2017
2. Keane, A. and Gibson, I.S., "*Communication trends in engineering firms: implications for undergraduate engineering courses*". Inter. J. of Engg. Educ., (1999) 15, 2, 115-121
3. Lesiker & Flatley. "*Basic Business Communication: Skills for Empowering the Internet Generation*". Tata McGraw hill, New Delhi, 2007, Print
4. Mojibur, R. "*Teaching Oral Communication Skills - A Task Based Approach*". ESP World. Vol.1. , 2010
5. "*Quality suffers, English still foreign for Gujarati students*" DNA, Sunday 24 November 2013. Web. retrieved from <http://www.dnaindia.com/ahmedabad/report-quality-suffers-english-still-foreign-for-gujarat-students-1924123>
6. Riemer, M.J., "*Integrating written communication skills in engineering education*". Proc. 6th Baltic Region Seminar on Engng. Educ., Wismar/ Warnemünde, (2002). 187-190 <http://www.wiete.com.au/journals/GJEE/Publish/vol8no2/Patil+Riemer.pdf> retrieved on 21st March 2017
7. Sageev, P., Romanowski, C.J., "*A message from recent engineering graduates: results of a survey on technical communication skills*". Journal of Engineering Education, (2001), pp. 687-689.
8. http://campusconnect.infosys.com/HomeDownloads/SS2.1_PA_2015.pdf retrieved on 21st March 2017

Bhaveshkumar Bipinchandra Rana (Research Scholar, GTU)

Asst. Prof. in English

Government Engineering College,

Near Sanskar Kendra

College, Road, Valsad- 396001

Email: bbrgecv@gmail.com

Mobile : 8980035433

&

Dr. Seema R. Gida (Research Supervisor)

Associate Professor and Head (Dept. of English)

The Late M. J. Kundaliya Arts and Commerce Mahila College,

Rajkot, Gujarat

Email: s_gida@yahoo.co.in

Mobile: 9426900914