

LSRW AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

With the backdrop of globalization English has become the most widely spoken and accepted language, worldwide. It has also crept into the fields of science and technology and therefore, indispensable for the students pursuing these fields. For engineering students it has off late become very essential to be proficient in English as most corporate and multinational companies have English as their medium of conversation and instruction. The employers also feel that this skill of communicating in English is essential as their job portfolio involves interacting with foreign clients who are only familiar with English. As a measure to ensure students settle down with a secured career, colleges have incorporated English courses which focuses on developing LSRW skills. This article throws light on the importance of LSRW skills for an engineering student, the various aspects involved and steps to improve these skills thereby enabling students to excel in communication in English.

KEYWORDS: Globalization- English- Engineering- LSRW- Communication

INTRODUCTION

English has become inevitable in the modern era of globalization. Mere subject knowledge is not sufficient for a student to land or even compete in the competitive job market. Reputed multinational companies and IT firms which are the main focus of engineering students always look out for students with extraordinary communication skills along with subject knowledge. Therefore English is considered more as a skill rather than a subject. In India, English education is given utmost importance because of the fact that it helps to frame the future of the student. Also it boosts up the confidence of students who are in line to face the competitive world. But many factors impede students in doing so even in urban areas where the exposure provided to students is comparatively higher than the students from rural backgrounds.

English being the current Lingua franca throughout the world is considered important and essential as its usage in an ever growing field such as engineering is indispensable. In our country, a major share of students who enroll for engineering hail from small towns and rural areas where the medium of instruction in schools will be the regional vernacular language. And, it is these students who find it difficult to excel in English communication skills. It is only in their tertiary stages of education that students realize the significance of English in their academic front. Engineering students encounter English during their tenure as a student in countless ways such as theories, seminars, lectures, lab sessions, project reports and paper presentations. And also during the process of job seeking engineering students go through a series of interviews and group discussion sessions.

After recruitment, they are expected to work in groups and solve issues for which they have to co-ordinate and communicate with fellow team members and clients who maybe from different parts of the world. To achieve this herculean task mastery and competence over English proficiency, is the only solution.

In order to cater to the needs of the students, and to address their needs pertaining to English communication skills, the University Grants Commission made English compulsory at the undergraduate level thereby helping students to become globally competent. The English syllabus for engineering students is designed to enhance four major skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing as a step to boost up the performance of students during selection interviews and group discussions during placements and also in their future years. In short, one can say that it is good command and fluency over English and subject knowledge that decides the academics and future career choices of an engineering student.

LSRW- LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING, WRITING

Mastery over any language requires proficiency over four skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. During the early stages of childhood children listen to the language that is spoken at home or within that local community. This often is the mother tongue of the child. The child picks up this language by listening to what everybody around him/her are speaking. Therefore, a child acquires the skill of listening at this very young stage itself. The next step is when the child listens to what is spoken carefully and tries to reciprocate the sound and as a result the skill of speaking is developed. Formal education in schools introduces the child to reading and writing. Speaking and writing are referred to as productive skills as they are responsive in nature. The learner is active during these processes and produces a sound while speaking or the alphabets are put together to produce a word, sentence and so on. While on the other hand, reading and listening are called receptive skills as the learner is passive during these processes and obtains information through listening or reading.

In English, there are many words which have the same spelling but are pronounced differently. There are also few other words which have the same pronunciation but vary in their meanings. The above mentioned four skills are key skills that when put to use effectively would help us understand the subtle differences and nuances of any language.

Listening

Listening is the most important skill that one requires in language learning. Though considered a receptive skill, it is an active process that requires practice for improvement and acquiring the same. Such importance is given to listening as it eventually leads to understanding and comprehending the information that is being spoken. Further, it also leads to recording of the words spoken into ones that make complete sense and repeating the same, a process which is referred to as retention and reproduction. It is not only a cognitive function but also involves several other complex analytical maneuvers such as understanding the pronunciation, articulation, theme, modulation, intonation, volume, pace and mood of the speaker. It is all these factors that pose difficulties for the students.

In order to overcome these issues English lab sessions should be conducted, where students are encouraged to listen to speeches and conversations in English and exercises based on the audio should be conducted. This will not only improve their listening skill but also their vocabulary. An article from a newspaper or magazine can be shared in class and students can be asked to discuss about the same. This way their speaking skill is also improved and they would be

motivated to read more. Listening comprehension based communicative games which are available online can also be used in classrooms. Techniques such as note-making, paraphrasing, mirroring and summary writing can be employed to help students improve their listening skill.

Speaking

Speaking follows listening. An active and productive skill, a learner begins to speak by retention and reproduction as mentioned earlier. A speaker expresses his/ her thoughts as a response or initiates a conversation through speaking and therefore it is also called as a creative skill. And in order to express it meaningfully one must speak the language in its correct form. While speaking one must also focus on tone, articulation, pronunciation, thought clarity and expression. The main problem that most students face with speaking is that they do not know how to frame a complete meaningful sentence which can express their thoughts and hence many students refrain from interaction in English during the class hours. They become very apprehensive of being teased and therefore prefer to remain silent. Such actions will prove detrimental to the student during the time of placement interviews and recruitment drives which are held at regular intervals in some colleges where the students are expected to speak in English.

Oral activities are the key to improve speaking skills. Activities such as describing people, objects and situations can help in the enhancement of speaking skills. It also helps in improving their vocabulary skills. Students can be made to involve in oratorical activities in groups or as individuals in the form of role plays, JAM (Just a Minute), debates, elocution etc. to improve their communication, team building and interpersonal skills. Topics from the syllabus can be allotted to every student to be presented before the class to improve their presentation skills. Mock interviews and group discussion sessions should be arranged by the faculty in charge in a regular basis to help students overcome the fear of interviews and help them communicate their thoughts in a polished and professional way.

Reading

Reading is an essential skill that one ought to develop as it results in understanding or comprehending the given written material. It is a complex process as it involves decoding the graphical symbols of a language into a meaningful group of words which when put together makes complete sense. Therefore, we can say that reading involves decoding or recognition, framing or structuring and interpretation. Reading can help in improving pronunciation as it introduces us to a new field called phonetics. It also helps the reader to improve vocabulary, articulation and throws light on the importance of modulation, intonation, punctuation marks etc. it is passive and receptive in nature. Reading plays a major role in academics as it promotes one's knowledge regarding that particular subject. And in order to get the full essence of the content, good command over the language is necessary. Good reading helps in better understanding and produces efficient learners who become successful academically. Since most of the textbooks for engineering are available in English, students who do not have a grasp over English find it difficult to read and benefit from them.

For academic purposes, students practice intensive reading where they read a passage or a paragraph in depth with an aim of comprehending the written matter and extracting information from it. This is mainly done when they read textbooks pertaining to subjects. It is more of an analytical process as they tend to analyze the details given. However, extensive reading is practiced while reading a storybook, comic or magazine where the primary aim is to comprehend the matter and no particular focus is needed. It is otherwise called reading for enjoyment. Students can be provided with reading comprehension activities during class hours to improve their reading skill. They can also be

motivated to read newspapers, magazines or journals on a regular basis as it would help to improve vocabulary and pronunciation also. Students should also be introduced to techniques such as scanning and skimming which are helpful at college level.

Writing

Among the four mentioned skills, writing is the most difficult of them all as it is an extension of the other skills. It is productive and active in nature. In order to write a learner must be familiar with the written graphical symbols initially. This practice is given in kinder garden stage where students are made familiar with the curves and strokes that one uses in alphabets. In the next stages learners are encouraged to frame small words with the alphabets and then frame sentences with the formed words and so on. At higher grade level students are taught to be proficient in essay writing activities. Writing is also a method of expression of thoughts and therefore is a creative skill. In order to write, one must be familiar with the grammar of that particular language, correct word order and vocabulary. This would help to convey the message coherently. Writing is an essential component in academics as performance of students are evaluated based on written tests. For engineering students writing skills come handy during lab report writing, projects and higher studies abroad where foreign universities ask students to provide a write up regarding their interests in a particular subject within a prescribed number of words. Due to the lack of adequate training received in grammar and other aspects of English, most students fail in writing tasks.

Written activities such as essay writing, story writing and poem writing should be conducted in class at regular intervals as students tend to lose touch in these areas once they walk out of school. Dictation and transcription exercises can also be arranged such that students get familiar with spellings and improve their vocabulary. Faculties associated with core subjects can also motivate students to summarize the lessons taught as this will train students in condensing the material and organizing their thought flow. This technique would be very helpful for students during the time of examinations where students have to answer in an apt and crisp manner in a limited amount of time. Practice in the different types of letter writing, report writing, note making, proposal, resume writing should be continued in college level also as it will expose students to the different styles of writing which we come across daily.

CONCLUSIONS

English has been designated the status of lingua franca of the world which makes it all the more important in the lives of students. English communication skill is considered an important aspect in the career of a student pursuing engineering. It has become an essential prerequisite in the job market and also in the society. Students must realize that applications of LSRW is wide and therefore must pursue it with their whole heart. LSRW skills should be given equal impetus during college days in order to succeed in the challenging task of establishing a lucrative career in promising multinational corporations.

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