



English Language Skills Among Technical Students: Present Status And Strategies for Improvements

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ABSTRACT

The research paper English Language Skills among Technical Students: Present Status and Strategies for Improvements covers the general category. It discusses the present status of English language skills in technical students of Hindi Speaking States enrolled in Rajiv Gandhi Technical University, Bhopal and suggests various ways for enhancing primary English language skills among these students. The research paper tries to cover several aspects of teaching and learning strategies and methodologies of English language for technical students of Hindi Speaking States in elaborative form.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

Language is the source of communication and English language has emerged as a universal language. For technical students also, it has become increasingly important to be proficient in English. In present scenario, English is the main language in the field of education, business and economy. If one wishes to go for technical and higher education. It is important for him to know English. Further, literature relating to the subjects of Science, Engineering and Technology and also of medicine is available mostly in English language. It is essential for technical students to learn English for discussion, conversation, interviews and presentations. English also enhances their chances of employability, and fine-tune them for campus placement or recruitment. In order to succeed modern world technical students should have commendable command over English so far as the Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading comprehension skills are concerned.

Present Status

English is the most commonly spoken language in India. The hard fact about English in India is proportionate variation of its speakers' in India. However, more number of people knows and uses English as a second language in South and East India. In north India too, a good number of people use English as a medium of verbal communication. "But in the states such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Bihar there are no significant number of people who possess at least primary English language skills. These states are collectively known as Hindi speaking states as Hindi and its many dialects are used as primary medium of communication"¹. Majority of the students from these states enrolled in Rajiv Gandhi Technical University to pursue Engineering, Polytechnic, Pharmacy, and MCA degree courses. These students lack primary English language skills and they are unable to comprehend and interpret the texts and passages. "They are unable to understand the instructions, extract information and follow the instructional discourse provided by lecturers".² They lack required grammatical skills and proper words to express themselves for writing the text by their own. Their spoken part is also weak and pronunciation is unacceptable. They floundered while speaking and often confused in the pronunciation of 'z', 's' and 'sh'. In order to speak correct language, one should have knowledge of the phonetics of that language. The students of the Hindi Speaking states deficits the required knowledge of phonetics during their middle and higher secondary schools which make their speaking either funny or horrible. Though students perform grammatical exercises in schools but they did not acquaint with prosody or paralinguistic i.e. stress intonation, accent, power, pausing, pitching and articulation. "A number of technically-sound students have not been successful in job interviews just be-

cause of their lack of communication skills and there are cases of rank holders in engineering studies who could not go for higher studies abroad because of their lack of proficiency in English. A number of engineers employed have been sacked because of their poor English and Communication Skills".³

"When students enrolled in Technical colleges they are expected to possess certain primary English language ability that is further polished, refined and enhanced by lecturers and professors but student of Hindi speaking states deficit the required standard in speaking, listening, reading and writing English language"⁴. In such circumstances, the role of university, curriculum designers, institutions, teachers and instructors has become all the more important.

Strategies for Improvement

Strategies of teaching English language should be developed keeping pace with current demand of global market. "Linguists have demonstrated that there is not one single best method for everyone in all contexts and that no one teaching method is inherent superior to the others. Moreover, it is not always possible or appropriate to apply the same methodology to all learners who have different objectives, environments and learning needs."⁵ More attention should be paid on the development of learner's competence in communicative use of language. Following are few strategies that will enhance English language skills among technical students of Hindi Speaking States:

Creation of Favorable Environment

It is true that students from Hindi speaking states miss the English speaking environment. There is a need to provide favorable environment to these students for learning and acquiring English language skills. This can be done through various ways: speaking with these students in English; emphasizing practice because only through repeated practice one may develop proficiency in language usages; creating English speaking environment in the classrooms, campuses, and friend circles etc so that the learners become comfortable with the language; and building confidence in these students. "Most of the students are afraid of speaking English because they believe that they would make errors the moment they speak out. However, it must be understood clearly that errors are the strategies of learning and one masters any skills only by making mistakes."⁶ Through confidence and practice students will gradually develop English language skills and become proficient by the time they will complete their course.

Emphasize on Spoken English and Conversational English

Teachers need to emphasize on spoken English and conversational English. "Spoken English refers to pronunciation and

accent in general. It involves correct accentual, rhythmic and intonation pattern. While conversational English is the ability to participate verbally in different situations and involves interacting with one or more persons including public speaking."⁷ While conversational English is the ability to participate verbally in different situations like Giving Presentations, Public speaking, Thanking People, Introducing Others, Agreement and Disagreements and Making Enquiries. Through spoken and conversational English, the students will overcome their hesitation and barriers and be able to communicate effectively and confidently.

Teach General Indian English

We should teach General Indian English to these Students. There are varieties of English accent all over the world for example British English, American English, Australian English and Canadian English etc. The teaching model of pronunciation in India is Standard British Model. It is difficult to imitate the same accent of English language like native speakers as we learn a language not acquire it naturally. Therefore, "it is suggested not to blindly imitate the model of British Received Pronunciation rather follow General English Model of pronunciation proposed by Bansal and Harrison in 1994. Through this model accent of the students will sound natural and not artificial"⁸.

Need to Adopt Innovative Teaching Aids

Innovative methods such as English language teaching through media, multimedia and internet should be adopted. Media provides a lot of language practice to these students. Newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, books etc can develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Internet can also be used as an innovative method to enhance English language skills in these students. They should be encouraged to make use of internet as soon as they entered the college. "There should be positive attitude in the students towards the use of internet in English. The program has to start in the first year teaching programs and ensure that students are proficient internet users in the remaining years of their studies. This will also develop technical skills among students."⁹

"Multimedia technology can be used as an effective tool in language teaching. Multimedia technology is the use of computer technology, information technology, image processing technology, the text, the graphics, images, sound, video usage in modern teaching methods."¹⁰ Several technologies based teaching resources are also available such as online teaching material, English language teaching software and multimedia CD ROMS. In such programs students can listen to dialogue or watch video clips. Further, there are number of useful sites on the World Wide Web, where students can get instruction and practice the language skills such as reading, listening and writing. The university can encourage the use of innovative teaching aids by incorporating them in its curriculum.

Reform the Curriculum and the Evaluation System

"There is a dire need to reconsider the syllabus and curriculum of English. While drafting the syllabus, college teachers who really teach the classes should be consulted."¹¹ Of course, the level of syllabus should match the standards of graduate and post graduate course, perhaps the first thing that needs to be considered is the level of the majority of the students because it is the students for whom the syllabus is framed and teaching is carried out. Teachers should not only concerned with finishing the topic or covering the syllabus but they should also take feedback from students whether they have understood the subject matter otherwise they should adopt any alternative way of teaching or improve the methodology as per need and standard of the class. Teaching and learning is two way process with checking and caring for understanding. By understanding the language the students will become careful and critical readers; practice listening, speaking, reading and writing in a variety of genres; build analytical and interpretive skills; and ultimately become more effective thinkers and communicators.

Besides syllabus, there is also an exigency to reform evaluation system so that assessment methods of teaching-learning of English could be evolved. "The traditional examination system stressed mainly on checking the writing skills or to an extent, reading skills of the students".¹² But practically, there is need to devise a comprehensive assessment strategy that will assess all four language skills viz listening, speaking, reading and writing. As technical students need to converse, discuss and give presentations in their job so they are required to be confident and well conversant in oral presentation and public speaking. In order to encourage students to practice public speaking effectively, it is necessary to assess speaking skills. There should be recording of the practical examination and evaluation should be done by some other examiner on the basis of recording. Listening tests should be done in language labs only where piece of some audio clips should be played and students give the answers to the questions based on audio clips. By learning these skills students will acquire high proficiency in their communication skills and as a result they will have greater confidence, develop their personality and improve their prospectus in life.

Conclusion:

It is true that nobody is born with power of language everybody learns and develop it according to his or her need and means. Teachers and instructors play significant role in developing soft skills and personalities of technical students. They have to adopt quantitative as well as qualitative methods, tools and technology that suits present day requirement and meet the need of the hour. Whatever method we are adopting the sole aim should be to strengthen students to acquire the ability to speak and write English effectively in real life situation, to inculcate listening and reading habit which helps them to enrich their vocabulary and vocalic. Teaching should facilitate the students to face practical world confidently. Students should be capable to demonstrate learning through actual experience. Methodologies should combine English language learning and social issues which are relevant to the student's growth and will lead to positive outcome in education. In nut shell its aim should be to equip students with the linguistic tools to communicate internationally. On the whole, the sole aim of writing this article is to make learning and teaching of English language easy for these students as well as for their instructors so that both of them reap the benefit of the language; then only the purpose will be solved and task will be accomplished.

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