RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting ESL Engineering Students' Communicative Competence in Academic English (CCAE)

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Abstract

The present study focused on the impact of socio-cultural factors on English second language speaking proficiency at multicultural environment. 583 B. Tech engineering undergraduate students including both boys and girls participated in this study. Survey research method has been adopted to conduct the study, and structured questionnaire, audio and video recording are research tools used for the data collection. The structured questionnaire included 5 sections; socio-cultural impact on the English second language communication competence is one of the sections of the structured questionnaire. Section has 5 questions, focused on learners' self-efforts, teachers' intervention and support, multilingual environment and learners' choice to create a small group or to join a small group of same mother tongue speaking or other languages. Learners' self-efforts in utilizing the available resources online and offline around him/her. The finding s of the study shows that 64 percent of the participants said that they do not use weekend time of practicing speaking in English or using online or offline resources to enhance their English-speaking skills. On the other hand, 80 percent of the respondents agreed that practicing speaking in English with other language speakers in college premises will enhance their proficiency in academic English. Only 18.5 percent of the students stated that they do not join the group, who speaks same mother tongue for daily casual conversation. These students showed interest in joining the group which other than his/her mother tongue is spoken for casual conversation and academic discussions. In conclusion, the study recommends there is a need to emphasize on practical classes and laboratory session in academic syllabus. The practical sessions and/or laboratory sessions need to be given adequate attention in evaluation and grade awarding to the learners.

Introduction

India being a secular nation, using English as a link language for communication on a national platform to unite the states with different regional languages, for administration and English is a language for court of law. English has been playing a role of lingua-franca in the world in 21st century. English is the most preferred language in the field of science and technology in the world. The advanced developments in the field of computer technology and scientific innovation have changed the geographical boundaries with respect to knowledge, employment, showcase of skills and presentation of creativity. Therefore, developed countries are readily welcoming the talented, skillful human resources from any country. In today's 21st century world knowledge and wisdom are being honored on a global platform. As a result, English is the language playing the role of lingua-franca to communicate with world class people at different levels and with a various kind of relations.

Prospective skillful engineering graduates are expected to have good command on the English second language LSRW skills. The proficiency in English oral and written communication is examined before giving the offer letter the fresh graduates on the global platforms. Language is a medium of communication the 16 years of acquired skills, knowledge and wisdom of any graduate is expected to present well in oral and written communication as well demonstrate in the field for the welfare of the organization and for the society at large. Presentation of the knowledge on any platform or in the field is more important than gaining the skills and knowledge from different sources through academia, environment, peer group and parent. Therefore, proficiency in English language for academic purposes is significant. The present study focuses on the English second language speakers' communicative competence in academic English.

This area of English language production with respect to Indian English speaker is very less researched. There is urgent need to conduct research studies in English second language speaking skills assessment in academia, technical tools for speech assessment and tools for listening skills assessment. There are a few research studies conducted in this area, they are mentioned below.

King Abdulaziz (2015) studied in the paper titled "Traditional & Socio-Cultural Barriers to EFL Learning: A Case Study." Focused on impact of traditional beliefs on English language learning, socio-cultural barriers, learners' motivation and attitude towards English language learning. The study has its own limitations, the geographical limitations, population of the study is limited and objectives limitations. It cannot be generalized to rest of the world. Findings of the study says that externa motivation from the parents is not positive, parents do not encourage their children to learn English, and the second reason is the skillful teachers to teach English are not available, which means the curriculum is also not given adequate importance to teach English language. Therefore, English language learners in Saudi Arabia have the problem of proficiency in English.

Elmakki Amiri and Abderrahim El Karfa, (2021). Conducted the research, titled The Impact of Learning Environment on EFL Students' Academic Achievement: A study of Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Academic Achievement. Found that the high socio-economic status of the students results in positive way whereas the low socio-economic status of the students hinders the success of

Dr. Jaipal & Dr. Rajakumar Guduru

English foreign language learning. Stating that high socio-economic status of the students allows them to have access to libraries, buy books and meet native speakers at foreign countries.

Significance of the study

The study will contribute to the personal and academic development of the students studying in higher education institutions. It also helps in bringing awareness among the students about the established socio-cultural habits form language competency aspect which ultimately impacts academic performance of the students. The report also helps to English language teachers in India to think creative and implement new ideas and techniques to teach English language productive skills. At the outset, the study can be a milestone for Indian skilled human resources in various engineering and other professional fields having communicative competence in Academic English and in general to serve the world at large.

Scope of the study

The population of the study includes B. Tech undergraduate students from Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology Nagpur**,** and Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar. Size of the population is 583, which includes boys and girls. The age group of the population is between 18 – 21 years. The study focused on the English Second Language communication competence in academic English of these engineering undergraduates. Special attention is on multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment at Higher Educational institutions like IITs and NITs. Its effect towards enhancing communication competence in academic English.

Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to examine how the socio-cultural factors affect Communicative Competence in Academic English in India.

The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the socio-cultural factors affecting Communicative Competency in academic English (CCAE).

- To understand the difference between cultural thought process structure and English language Syntactic structure of thought process.

Research Questions

1. What are the socio-cultural factors can affect Communicative Competence in Academic English in India?

Literature Review

Levels Modular Model of Speech Production: "Several attempts have been made in the literature to set up a comprehensive model of speech processing, but the most widely used theoretical framework in L2 language speech Production research is Levelt's (1989) model originally developed for monolingual communication (for a schematic representation), the newest version of the model (Levelt, 1999). proposed that speech production is a modular that is, it can be described through the functioning of a number of processing components that are relatively autonomous in the system."

"The basic mechanism of speech processing are conceptualized by Levelt in a fairly straightforward manner: people produce speech first by conceptualizing the message, then by formulating its language representation (syntactic structure), and finally by articulating it (phonemes)."

Conceptual level:

According to the Levelts' Modular theory the first phase one of speech production is conceptual level. Speakers' intended message is generated through macro and micro planning. The intended message of the speaker is produced through speech acts. Speech acts are actions of any speaker performs like requesting, questioning, appreciating, apologizing, and

expressing personal views…etc. (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The speaker needs to select the message / information to be encoded and decide the order on which the intended message can be conveyed. Whether the object is to be given the importance, or the subject based on the previous discourse. If it is first time conversation how to address the opponent; formal, informal gender and role.

Syntactic level

The second phase of the speech production is syntactic structure of a speech act. If the intended message or information is decided and clear, the second step is to incorporate the message / information into grammatically accepted sentence structure, whereas the subject verb agreement, tense, verb forms, synonyms, place of prepositions and articles respectively need to be given appropriate position in the sentence.

Phoneme level

The third and very important stage of speech production. Majority of the English second language speakers face the severe problem at this level. It is all about phonemes or speech sounds of English language, which very different from their mother tongue phonemes or fist language phonemes. The speech organs Lips, Nose, Upper teeth ridge, lower teeth ridge, roof of the mouth and soft palate, alveolar ridge, vocal cards are patterned to produce his/her first language / mother tongue phonemes already. English phonemes are very new to produce without due practice. Therefore, English second language speakers face difficulties at third phase of speech production i. e. phoneme level. Phonemes are grouped into syllables; syllables are grouped into phrases and the words and phrases are grouped into sentences. One has to be able to use these three phases of the speech production, in order to have the communicative competence.

Communicative Competence

The term Communicative competence is used for the first time by Dell Hymes (1967) with reference to social rules of language use. Hymes came up with this concept as a response to Norm Chomsky' notion of Linguistic Competence. Communicative competence has been defined as an individual's ability to use language appropriately in a social context to achieve his/her communication needs. It has been widely adopted by the succeeding authors. Canale and Swain (1980) emphasized the significance of the competence in accordance with learner's communicative needs. Savignon (1972) empirical study finds that the communicative ability of a speaker is not determined by grammatical knowledge. Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence as a sum of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and

Strategic competence. Therefore, Celce-Murcia et al (1995) presented a revised model of communicative competence, which incorporates the five core competences; 1. Linguistic competence, 2. Strategic competence, 3. Sociocultural competence, 4. Actional competence and 5. Discourse competence.

Methods and Materials

Survey research method has been adopted to conduct this study. The research tools; structured questionnaire and video recording has been employed for the data collection. The population of the study are from Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur and Indian Institute of Technology, Bhubaneshwar B. Tech undergraduates.

Preliminary information

The population of the study is from VNIT Nagpur and IIT Bhubaneswar. 583 B. Tech undergraduates from both institutions participated in this study. Girls were 141 which is of 24.2 percent and 441 boys which is of 75.6 percent. The below pie chart shows the place, where participants spent their childhood time

because it has a significant role in learning a second language with respect to environment.
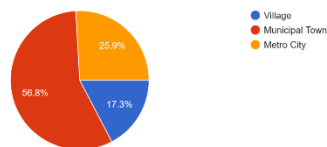

Figure 1: Primary Schooling of students

331 respondents which is 56. 8 percent said that they spent their childhood in municipality towns or semi urban areas. 551 participants which counts for 25.9 percent mentioned that their childhood has been spent in Metro cities and the 17. 3 percent of the participants recorded that they spent their childhood in villages.

Results

Population of the study: all the participated population of the study are B. Tech undergraduates, aged between 16 to 20 years. Total no of participants is 583, boys 75.6 % and girls 24. 2%. 61.6 % from IIT Bhubaneswar and 38.4 % from VNIT Nagpur. Girls from VNIT Nagpur and Boys from VNIT Nagpur have been taken part, and from IIT Bhubaneswar girls are … and boys are ….

There are five questions incorporated with respect to socio-cultural factors affecting communication competence in Academic English in the questionnaire as subsection of the questionnaire.

The question no. 1 focused on the learner's self-efforts and enthusiasm to practice regularly speaking in English. The obtained data reveals that 35.9 percent of the participants said that they dedicate the weekend time for practicing speaking in English, 28.5 percent of the participants mentioned that they do not spend the weekend time to practice speaking in English, 35.7 percent of the participants are neutral. The below shown pie chart shows the response of the participants on a five points

scale; starting from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree.
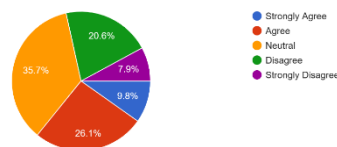

Figure 2: Self-efforts of the Students

The question no. 2 focused on teacher's interference and support to the learner to practice speaking in English in and around the college premises. The obtained data is presented in a form of pie chart below.
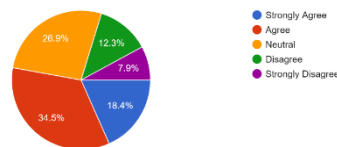

Figure 3: Teachers' Interference and Support to Students

53 percent of the participants responded that their teacher encourages them to speak in English and corrects if any grammar, vocabulary and subject verb agreement errors. 27 percent of the participants replied that they are neutral. Another 20 percent of the participants revel that they do not agree with the statement that the teacher corrects the mistakes made while speaking and encourages them to speak in English.

Question no 3 of the section focused on the effect for interaction and regular conversation with other languages speakers to improve self-proficiency of speaking in English. The below mentioned pie chart shows that 80.5 percent of the respondents said that their proficiency in speaking English will enhance. 14 percent of the respondents said that they are neutral and the remaining 5.5 percent of the participants said that they interaction with other

Dr. Jaipal & Dr. Rajakumar Guduru

languages speaking individuals don not enhance their English-speaking proficiency.

3. Communicating with the students of multi-lingual and multi-cultural backgrounds improves my English language learning and proficiency.
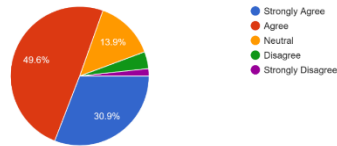583 responses

Figure 4: Role of Multi-lingual Environment

Question no. 4 focused on the resources available to the learner and his/her efforts to make use of them to enhance his/her Speaking skills. The pie-chart shown below presents the recorded responses by the participants as 75.2 percent of them make use of the resources online and offline available to them. 31.9 percent of them stated that they are neutral and the 18.5 percent mentioned that they do not use the online and offline resources.

4. To improve my English language skills, I use online resources in form of English blogs, videos, movies, songs, games, news articles, etc.
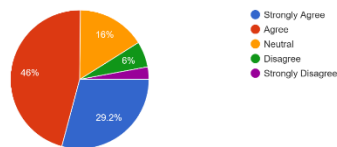583 responses

Figure 5: Resources Available and Access to Resources

Question no. 5 targets the data to be collected about the learners' openness and readiness to interact with other language speakers in English. If the learner is joining the group that speaks the same mother tongue, he/she feels comfortable in communicating with in the group. It leads to have sub-groups of same cultural and language, it creates the comfortless and builds the confidence with in the sub-group for their social life. On the other side, it is creating limitations to their practice in speaking English language for their daily routine conversations in and around the institution premises. The obtained data reveals that 49.6 percent of the participants mentioned

that they join the group that speaks in same mother tongue and same cultural practices. 31.9 percent of the respondents stated that they are neutral, they do not want to reveal the facts. The 18.5 percent of them recorded their response as they do not join the group that speaks in same mother tongue and same cultural practices. Which can be understood that they are more open for learning new things and curious to master their English-speaking skills. According to the collected data and interpretation, percentage of the learners who are open to learn new things and English-speaking skill is 18.5, which is very less in number.

5. I prefer to interact with students who share the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
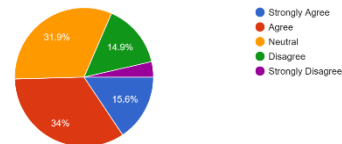583 responses

Figure 6: Peer Group Impact

Discussion

T. No. 1 Comprehensive Summary Table:

	Positive response %	Neutral response %	Negative response %
Q. 1	35.9 (209)	35.7 (208)	28.5 (166)
Q. 2	52.9 (308)	26.9 (157)	20.2 (118)
Q. 3	80.5 (469)	13.9 (81)	5.6 (33)
Q. 4	75.2 (438)	16 (93)	8.9 (52)
Q. 5	49.6 (289)	31.9 (186)	18.5 (108)

As per the above table no. 1 it shows that the learner is aware of the affecting external factors to enhance his/her own proficiency in speaking in English. Therefore, the score of the question no. 2, 3, and 4 are above 50 percent is positive. Whereas the score of Question no. 1 of self-efforts and enthusiasm to practice speaking in English and making use of the available

resources is less than 40 percent positive. Which means there is a need of self-motivation and realization from the learners. What are the corrective measures to enhance the level of self-motivation and self-efforts to practice speaking in English? Internal motivation and external motivation need to be boosted.

Another section of the questionnaire focused on the production aspect, difficulties while speaking English second language. There are 6 questions in this section to collect the data from the participants. As shown below pie-chart Question no. 1 focused on finding the contextually right word to convey the intended meaning or conceptual level of speech production (Levelt, 1999a). 328 respondents which are of 56.3 percent of total 583 respondents say that they have difficulty in finding the right word to communicate their intended meaning. 164 participants, which are of 28.3 percent are neutral they do not want to express their view. The rest of 91 respondents which are of 15.6 percent recorded their responses as they do not find any difficulty in finding the right word while speaking in English second language. It does not mean that they do not have the amount of vocabulary for expressing their thoughts in English second language but lack of regular practice speaking in English is contributing the failure of lexical encoding with lemmas (Levelt, 1989). The temporal cycles (Skarbek, 1966) mentioned that the speech production alternates in low and high fluency; it slows down when it comes to speaking on a new topic.

1. While speaking, I have difficult y in finding and using the right word in the context.
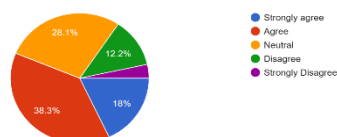583 responses

Figure 7: Problem of Retrieving Vocabulary

Implications

- The findings of the study will generate the data, which will be useful for the curriculum designers.
- The students will come to know, what are the possible areas that they can execute their efforts to improve the communicative competence in academic English.
- The data will also be useful for forensic studies to analise the recorded phone conversations.
- The study becomes a resource to the English Language teaching Teacher for working on better teaching methods and materials. Teachers also refer this resource to prepare the lesson plans for the benefit of the students in the classroom.

Scope for further research

As the study has limited to Engineering undergraduates and only to VNIT Nagpur and IIT Bhubaneswar, it can be extended to other professional students and other areas and states of the nation.

Conclusions

Data analysis shows that the participants self-motivation needs to be improved towards enhancing the communicative competence in Academic English. "Learners must be granted the opportunity to engage in meaningful communication with highly competent speakers in realistic situations, and that instructors should present the more arbitrary aspects of communication (e.g., syntactic requirements of the L2) in the light of more universal aspects, such as turn- taking and the appropriate conditions for requests." Canale and Swain (1980). The English second language classroom should dedicate the sufficient time for practice speaking in English with different social speech acts. The course evaluation matrix should give equal portion of marks while conducting the exams. This will result in enhancing learners' self-motivation towards practicing speaking in

Dr. Jaipal & Dr. Rajakumar Guduru

English. College administration should provide sufficient required infrastructure such as laboratory facilities, software felicities, and faculty members.

Acknowledgement

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