RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE NEED TO UPGRADE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS AND METHODS TO COUNTER THE GROWING PROBLEMS IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS TO ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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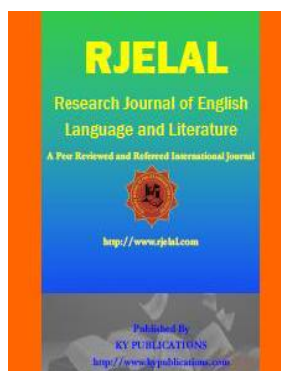
ABSTRACT

This paper examines the problems that a trainer face while teaching basic language skills to the students of professional courses in general and Engineering students in particular.

By examining this, an attempt has been made to find out the reasons, 1. for the lack of correlation between the specific learning objectives in the case of components included in the curriculum and the learning outcome of the learner and 2. the absence of a comprehensive system to evaluate the levels of learning achieved by the learner.

It has been reached at a surmise that there are issues of very grave nature to be addressed very comprehensively to make teaching English for professional students a meaningful activity, after studying the curriculums prescribed by two Universities offering Engineering Courses and a quantitative analysis of the college level data available. Data has been collected from an Engineering College examinations database.

The major impetus of this paper is to show that some lacuna exists in the curriculums. The paper also suggests an alternate method to impart language skills. This paper states that regular upgrading of the curriculums, and the teaching material and methods used to impart training in language skills become a reality when the real problems are put to test. This paper has made a distinct attempt to bridge the gap that exists between the learning objectives set and the actual levels of learning achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has affected every aspect of human life. Employment opportunities are burgeoning in the field of Industry, Technology and Services. There is a great demand for highly skilled man power. A country like India, whose population below the age of 30, is 50% is presumably the only big source of work force required in the onward march of the economies across the world. India cannot shy away from this responsibility. India's contribution to the global talent pool is never dismal. Still the extra mile has to be run. A very

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gigantic work force has to be trained for the future. India started to answer it very affirmatively.

There is no dearth for institutions in India for training such a massive work force to meet this requirement. A state like Andhra Pradesh, pre-bifurcation had only 20 Engineering colleges two decades ago. There was a manifold increase in the number of Engineering Colleges in the past one decade. Now there are almost 398 Engineering colleges in the newly formed state of Andhra Pradesh training young professionals. As per the statistics available Andhra Pradesh has the potential to train more than 1.6 Lakh Engineering Graduates.

But it looks paradoxical when the industry leaders maintain that getting right talent is still not an easy task. The National Knowledge Commission under the Chairman Ship of the Honorable Prime Minister of India made a similar observation regarding the talent pool of India. According to the Knowledge Commission findings only 5 to 6% of the students passing out of the professional education institutions are employment worthy. In other words majority of the students passing out every year has got only the basic qualifications but not the relevant hard and Soft Skills required.

It is really a matter of concern for every one working in the field of education. The industry is looking for employability in every candidate. Mere knowledge or intelligence does not raise the employability in a candidate. Many a studies across the world at different corporate work environments have proved it time and again that it is the right blend of Knowledge, Hard skills, Soft skills and Attitude that improves the productivity.

In the light of these facts it becomes imperative on the part of every dutiful institution working with the vision of training the future professionals to take up a meaningful study and understand all the implications and device a plan to face this challenge. So an urgent and a deep study of the curriculum used for the training is very much required.

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of the Curriculum prescribed for the Engineering students a study was conducted to show that there is no correlation between the actual learning outcomes and the expected learning out comes. The effectiveness of the curriculum can be estimated from the kind of the job a student wins. The objective of the curriculum should be to fine tune the students into effective professionals.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is ascertain the relation between the following

1. Performance of the students in the Technical English Communication Skills paper and their actual level of communication
2. Performance of the students in the qualifying examinations and English Communication Skills paper.
3. Performance of the students in the English Communication Skills paper and their performance in other papers.

Data and Methodology

The data for the study were taken from Vasireddy Venkatadri Institute of Engineering & Technology, Guntur. The data has been collected from the Examinations Data Base of the College. A round of oral evaluation was conducted for 30 students from all four branches *viz* ECE, EEE, CSE and IT of the I B.Tech Course.

To obtain data for the component of the actual levels of communication an oral test was conducted with five parameters named Content, Relevance, Spontaneity, Appropriateness, Clarity and Confidence each evaluated on a scale of 20 marks.

Curriculum

The syllabus prescribed by the J N T University Kakinada for the paper titled English Communication Skills (*see Appendix – A*). This curriculum is delivered to all the students of the college by the different faculty members and it is assumed that all the students received same kind of instruction and training.

Use of Correlation

It has been assumed that the scores achieved by the students in the English Communication Skills paper do not correlate with the actual level of Communication of the students i.e the level they achieved after undergoing training. This observations has led to arrive at the conclusion that the 1. the curriculum is not delivered properly,

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2. the Teaching methods are inconsistent to the curriculum being handled and 3. there are serious learning deficiencies among the students.

Limitations

The results produced by the students are related to only Curriculum designed by J N T University Kakinada. The results may vary for other curriculum prescribed by other universities. As the objective of the study is to show the requirement of a review of the curriculums in place and the effective teaching methods to be adopted, a detailed point to point comparison with various other curriculums of other universities was not taken up.

Result of the Data Analysis

i)   Curriculums - Inconsistencies

The JNTU curriculum for Communication skills and Soft Skills and the Acharya Nagarjuna University Curriculum used for the same purpose are compared to study the distinct features. It is observed that there is a wide gulf between the Industry requirements and the activities taken up as part of the curriculum. For instance the students who wish to make a career in the IT industry should have very good communication skills. It is a professional requirement for them to be able to write well. One who cannot give a verbal face to the work he or she did can't stake claim for growth. A study of the 1st year English Language and Communication Skills Curriculum for the B.Tech students reveals the truth that they are not exposed to this skill. The basic writing skills exercises prescribed are not sufficient enough to empower the student to face the challenges. There is no element of Live Examples.

ii)   Teaching – Deficiencies

Another important point observed is the use of the outdated or obsolete methods of teaching by the teachers. It is a proved fact that when the teaching methods do not conform to the objectives set the outcome will be absolutely futile.

The class rooms are still teacher centric. The student involvement even in the CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) based Labs and class rooms are influenced by the patronizing attitude of the teachers.

iii)   Teaching Materials – Not uniform

The materials used for imparting the various job skills are significantly different across the universities. They are not regularly updated to suit to the requirements of the industry. The traditional structure of Prose and Non-detailed frame work does not yield the expected results.

iv)   Learner – Unprepared

This is the biggest challenges of all. The learner's Language learning skills determines the fruitfulness of any curriculum. The language skills acquired by the learner at the lower levels play a crucial role in making the teaching learning process a meaningful activity. The common problem found among the majority of the students is their inability to cope with the curriculum. This problem may not be widespread in some areas in the country which have good schools.

v)   Evaluation – Score oriented

The examination system currently followed by many Universities are Score centric than Change Centric. Some of the live skills learnt by the student can't be evaluated on a paper based examinations. The examination system is finally failing to offer a constructive feedback to the student regarding his strengths and weaknesses.

A few activities Suggested

1. While teaching Vocabulary the impetus should be on the source from where the words are drawn. The words taught are to be used by the student. If a News Paper is used in the classroom more and more words can be introduced to the students through live examples.

2. Using the Computer aided English Language Lab to provide adequate Listening opportunities.

3. Assigning project works to impart writing skills. This kind of an activity gives the student an opportunity to improve his or her presentation skills and also organizing skills.

4. Collection of Company related information from the internet or through News Paper by the student to improve his searching skills and presentation skills.

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5. Preparation of word list should be taken up as a serious work by the students because the activity is intended to make the students self dependent.

Conclusion

The study highlights the need to make a review of the existing curriculums. It is not the intention of the study to diminish in any way the usefulness of the Curriculums that heave been followed all these years. This study throws light on the need to upgrade the curriculums to accommodate the industry requirements. A process to update the Teacher's training competence should be taken up on regular basis. Teaching materials should be drawn from live sources.

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Appendix – A
ENGLISH SYLLABUS FOR SEM. 1 & 2 of JNTU-K
With Effect from 2013

S.No	Reading	Vocabulary	Grammar	Writing	Classroom Activities
1	In London – M K Gandhi	Using appropriate word/phrase	Nouns	Punctuation	Preparing to a short speech
		Synonyms		Paragraph Writing	Listening to conversations- 1
		Antonyms		Mind Mapping	
2	The Knowledge Society – A P J Abdul Kalam	Using appropriate word/phrase	Pronouns	Punctuation	Group Discussion
		Synonyms		Types of Paragraphs	Listening to conversations- 2
		Antonyms			
3	The Scientific Point of View – J B S Haldane	Suffixes	Articles	Punctuation	Listening to conversations- 3
		Antonyms	Indefinite articles	Summary Writing	
			Definite Articles		
4	Principles of Good Writing – L A Hill	Using appropriate word/phrase	Adjectives	Punctuation	Listening to news item
		Synonyms	Degrees of Comparison	Essay Writing	
		Antonyms			
5	Man's Peril – Bertrand Russel	Deriving Nouns	Prepositions	Punctuation	Listening to short lecture
		Synonyms	Phrasal Verbs	Speech Writing	

		Antonyms			
6	The Dying Sun – Sir James Jeans	Using appropriate word/phrase	Adverbs	Punctuation	Listening to a speech
		Synonyms	Adverbial Clauses	E-mail Writing	
7	Luck – Mark Twain	Using appropriate word/phrase	Conjunctions	Punctuation	Listening to an interview
		Synonyms		Argumentative Essay Writing	
		Antonyms			

Appendix – B

A Comparative study of the Performance of the students in the Technical English Communication Skills

paper and their actual level of communication

S.No	Student Name	Marks Obtained in Intermediate	Marks obtained in B.Tech
1	Ajay	62	35
2	Barathi	60	40
3	Bhaskar	60	41
4	Jiran	61	47
5	Kasim	60	44
6	Krishna	55	45
7	Madhavi	50	28
8	Mahendra	54	29
9	Mohan	54	33
10	Namitha	52	32
11	Narayan	56	31
12	Paul	50	34
13	Prasad	57	28
14	Puja	61	27
15	Radha	62	25
16	Rajendra	70	38
17	Raju	41	28
18	Ravi	60	32
19	Riyaz	65	24
20	Roop	59	29
21	Sajid	45	20
22	Saritha	61	19
23	Siva	52	25
24	Sri Ram	60	29
25	Sudha	49	30
26	Sujatha	56	31
27	Suresh	59	35
28	Uday	66	33
29	Varma	60	28
30	Vijai	69	35

The correlation between the averages of the two scores collected is 0.270

This value indicates that the degree of association between the scores is very bleak and hence proves that the curriculum is not either delivered properly or the learners have very specific learning deficiencies.

Appendix – C

S.No	Student Name	Marks Obtained in Intermediate English	Marks obtained in B.Tech TECS
1	Ajay	95	62
2	Barathi	96	60
3	Bhaskar	93	60
4	Jiran	94	61
5	Kasim	91	60
6	Krishna	90	55
7	Madhavi	85	50
8	Mahendra	89	54
9	Mohan	87	54
10	Namitha	88	52
11	Narayan	85	56
12	Paul	65	50
13	Prasad	89	57
14	Puja	95	61
15	Radha	94	62
16	Rajendra	90	70
17	Raju	80	41
18	Ravi	96	60
19	Riyaz	93	65
20	Roop	92	59
21	Sajid	65	45
22	Saritha	84	61
23	Siva	75	52
24	Sri Ram	83	60
25	Sudha	86	49
26	Sujatha	77	56
27	Suresh	87	59
28	Uday	85	66
29	Varma	82	60
30	Vijai	88	69

A Comparative study of the Performance of the students in the Technical English Communication Skills and the qualifying examination (in this case English score of IPE)

The correlation between the averages of the two scores collected is 0.582

This value indicates that the degree of association between the scores is only close to average levels. It does not indicate any affinity between the learning in the intermediate and the learning in the B.Tech