

ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Language is a medium of communication and communication skills-speaking, listening, writing and reading - are undoubtedly fundamental ingredients of our survival and growth in any profession. Expression is an activity which involves a systematic and continuous process of dissemination, listening and comprehension. Sound communication skills comprise conciseness, concreteness, clarity, correctness, courtesy, consideration, intonation, standard and authentic articulation of words/ sentences. We come across good communicators who are often competent persuaders as they keep the essential elements i.e. body language, voices, words in congruence to make their expression logical, believable and influential. The real enthusiasm in acquiring communication skills in English has always been deeply indebted in our subconscious as non-native speakers. Self-confidence, knowledge, sincerity, emotional balance, accuracy, fluency, reasoning, sympathy, open-mindedness, humility, humour, spontaneity, tact, intelligence and common sense etc are some of the key-features required to be an effective and efficient communicator. We learn and teach how to overcome the mental barriers, the time and space barriers, semantic barriers, perpetual barriers, distrust, inhibition etc in order to create better impression while expression. The objective of this paper is to discuss the importance of language acquisition for employability.

Keywords: Communication skills, Inhibition, Body language, Employability.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Narration of a language is as simple as that of life. We cannot imagine the existence of civilization, world even life without the impression of language. Perhaps the history of its existence is as old as this universe itself. Generally, language is a means of communication in the form of Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading (LSWR) through which we express our ideas, feelings, thoughts etc. and prove our identity. Through studying a language we, on the other hand, study a variety of thoughts because it is tool to project one's image, experience, wisdom upon another. Thus language is a system of systems. Linguistics directs us in imparting learning of language, its nature and variation through the study of sociolinguistics, dialectology, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, comparative linguistics, structural linguistics, semantics, pragmatics etc. These are relevant branches help us in comprehension of a language and to avoid communication gap or misunderstanding that is required for welfare of society as well development of a nation.

1.2 Language personifies a nation as well. It gets modified and updated as per historical/political, technological, regional, economic, social, cultural changes occurred in a country. Today, it is difficult to give the accurate number of languages available across the world because a particular language has many sub-plots as per its dialects. Thus linguistic variety, diversity and multi-linguistic approaches are dominant over the entire world and India is not an exception. Language is also known as disorganised and chaotic combination of sounds. The well-known proverb 'pen is mightier than the sword' does not hold much ground when one finds that the spoken words at the beck and call of a really good orator, can do much more than a pen. This is another side of the same coin. We can say language, today, is inseparable part of human society. In fact, it is through language only that human civilization has come out of the stone age and developed science, art, technology, law etc at great extent and English language has undoubtedly become a means of mass-communication, education, governance, career and survival in any profession globally.

1.3 Language knowledge and language usage for communication are two different aspects in the process of English language teaching-learning. The world-wide demand for English language has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching particularly functional and communicative aspects of English language. On the other hand, English language skills and fluency with accuracy in conversation has become prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world. Therefore, to use a language and to acquire communicative skills, we need to have an appropriate methodology in teaching functional aspects of communicative English.

2. ACQUIRING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

2.1 Since the day we are born, communication skills are all around us. From talking- to body language even- to listening, the skills we use in our life are personnel to one another. The acquirement of communication

skills by engineers as professionals is a key to enhance technical knowledge, workplace engagement at dynamic stages and demanding peace, changing business scenario and overall success in career. Communication is defined by Edgar Dale as “the sharing of the ideas and feelings in a mood of mutuality”. The need for effective and beneficial communication skills as professionals is now a day’s being very seriously articulated both by the educators and professionals alike. People communicate from morning to night, where people make their living through communication. Authors and actors, preachers and teachers are professional communicators. A proper communication skill serves and gauges the quantity and quality of information that flows from a knowledge intensive engineer to his workplace and organisation.

2.2 Effective communication is an essential component of organisational success whether it is at inter-personal, inter-group, intra-group, organisational or external level. Communication is the essence of organisational effectiveness and acts as social glue that keeps an organisation together. [1]The socio-economic changes in the new millennium and the competitive and diverse global market has made it a must for technocrats and engineers to have best communication ability, both oral and written for professional success. The vitality of English language skills has earned it as the status of *lingua franca*. Language, as a tool for communication is an effective means of exerting power, as asserted by Michel Foucault, ‘power is nothing but a strategy’. It is the power of language communication that provides the knock and knowledge to use the language as a strategy of power in society. The importance of English language is described by Dr. Radhakrishnan that, “English, however must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature – humanistic, scientific and technical.”[2]

2.3 In this age of globalisation, English is the most widespread and accepted language at international level. English is simple, systematic, effective and appropriate for the present day global engineers to interpret and ideate various technical skills and inter-cultural communication. The communicative approach to the learning of English can develop the capacity of engineers to communicate easily for their academic, social and professional growth with fluency and competitive ability.

3. TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

3.1 The success of an organisation is pivoted around the quantity and quality of information that flows in the form of technical communication. In the present arena of technocrats and engineering advancements, technical communication acts as a stimulant for engineers to be persuasive, expressive, influential and competent. “Technical Communication” is the process of gathering technical information and presenting it to a targeted audience in a comprehensive, grammatically correct, clear, useful, accurate, and in an easily understandable form. The term “technical communication” includes scientific, mechanical, chemical, legal, economic, medical, procedural or other specialized information.[2] One of the aspects of technical communication is described as “Scientists may or may not hold academic credentials in science or engineering. But they are always humanists, one foot in the sciences, the other in the arts, as apt to be seduced by a shapely sentence as by an elegant scientific idea”. [3]

3.2 The greater the communication skills of a person, better the status. Art of communication elevates an individual to an honourable position in society. It is a sine qua non for every engineer who wants to enjoy academic applause as well as social position in an age of liberalization, privatization and globalization, where everybody wants to communicate but does not know how to communicate. According to Alan Warner, “Words are the tools of thought. If they become rusty and dirty, and lose their sharp points and cutting edges thinking itself becomes keen and efficient. Man needs language for the control of his environment, and the fluent his language, the better his control.”[4] Need for being competent in engineering education is a must for an engineer as it is recognised in a number of places worldwide. Consequently, only competent, capable and committed communicator, having good command on languages of communication will be able to compete in the race of exhibiting his professional expertise culminating into powerful place in society.

4. EXPRESSION WITH IMPRESSION

4.1 Effective communication helps us to understand a person or situation and enables us to resolve differences, build trust and respect, and create environments where creative ideas, problem solving, affection, and caring can flourish. Means to say that, communication is the only means of preventing ourselves from isolation and we will act unwisely if we allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance. As simple as communication seems, much of what we try to communicate to others—and what others try to communicate to us—gets misunderstood, which can cause conflict and frustration in personal and professional relationships. By learning effective communication skills, you can better connect with your friends, and co-workers. [5] It is essential for an engineer to be technically

competent, productive and effective having one goal in mind, of convincing audience to take desired action. Communication skills determine to a great extent how effective we are and up to what extent appealing our behaviour is. Successful presentation of ideas helps us to tackle the needs and nature of audience that determines the content and customer focused approach and design the communication according to the academic, social and professional situations.

4.2 Completeness is one of the key attributes of successful communication. Engineers have to deal with business situations with less time, so they could control and capture the attention the employers and convince them with confidence. By skilled communication, an engineer can convey a sense of confidence and composure to maintain competence and practicality by exhibiting his professional expertise culminating into powerful place in society. To communicate effectively, one must realise that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.[6] Canale and Swain have recognized ‘the four important components of communicative competence’. The first is ‘grammatical competence’. Grammatical Competence combined the traditional structural competence what Halliday calls ‘systematic competence’. The second component is the ‘socio-lingual competence’. It includes the sensitivity to understand the factors like status, role, attitude, purpose, degree of formality, social communication etc. The third component is ‘discourse competence’ which includes the ability to combine meanings with unified and acceptable texts indifferent genres. The fourth component is ‘strategic competence’. It relates to verbal and non-verbal strategies which a learner requires to enhance the effectiveness of communication.[7]

4.3 Proper communication skills can have numerous dimensions and intricacies. It increases the proficiency, improves the attitude and gives a willingness to stand apart and make an impression. It enables an engineer to have empathy and capacity of looking at different situations from vivid perspectives. Good communication skills make an engineer sustained and effective in understanding and giving views efficiently. It gives proper intellectualism to be more effective. Engineer must be creative in communication so that he has the capacity to read the hidden message and unsaid consequences and further give a response to make situations under his advantage.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man
You can neither guess nor see
Because you are a heap of broken images

4.4 It is quite evident from the lines quoted above from T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” that there is a crisis of moral and spiritual values in the life of a modern man who is nothing but ‘a heap of broken images’. No doubt, we are living in a world of astonishing achievement of science and technology the entire world has shrunk into a global village because of drastic change in the field of information and communication. [8] As said by John Cocteau “The poet doesn’t invent. He listens”. Same goes for engineers. They have to listen in the form of conclusions to make improvement in them and present themselves for better results in career. Possessing good technical knowledge is essential for engineers but to be expressive and with good knowledge is must for achieving effective mass. Engineers have to express themselves and an exchange idea which increases the risk of rejection but a confident and proper communication in a synchronised manner can influence the sentiments of audience and achieve higher degrees of success and ensure perfect understanding. Effective communication ensures appropriate handling of various skills based on the nature, scope and depth of success level.

5. ENHANCEMENT IN SKILLS AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

5.1 Education is a process of human enlightenment and empowerment to achieve a better position in life. A sound system of education results in the enfoldment of engineers’ potentialities enlargement of their competencies, transformation of their interests, attitude and values. Verbal expressions should be proper. If we fail to communicate coherently, it leaves people in dilemma and unsure condition to what is expected from them. Proper preparation should be done before the actual process. Communication generates ‘social consciousness’ which creates the ability to act on collective goals. For the proper enhancement of communication skills and proper impact on audience, the theme should always be overall mutual interaction. Just presenting one’s thoughts is not good as alternate points of views should be considered to make a wonderful impact and make one’s presence acknowledged. Engineers must always focus and not be just akin to reading matter and news in the meetings. To achieve heights in success, engineers need to be prepared well in advance to deal with issues and business matters. Be it recruitment or training or hiring everything goes smooth and easy if proper communication skills are used, else wonderful opportunities can result into disasters.

5.2 In engineering field, inter disciplinary education approach has been adopted by a number of universities and institutions which offer technical studies in the present millennium. For an engineer both verbal and oral skills make the baseline because in present arena of cut-throat competition, for professional success, they need to be sure of the audience's attention and must speak at a reasonable pace and volume with variation in tones to influence and bring a feeling of interest in the audience. An engineer must be free from shyness, hysterics and fear of speaking in public otherwise it would be understood that communication done by him is suffering from linguistic constipation. Engineers have to deal with both passionate work addicts and bobble head employees, so they got to provide a new wave of emerging leader and make people more receptive to their words. Proper work and training is must because sometimes there might be a sense of urgency and in such cases establishment of pattern with sub-ordinates becomes necessary. An engineer must be a good listener as well and should be able to interpret what is being communicated in the conversation.

5.3 Being a good listener makes a good communicator. Enhancement in communication skills helps an engineer to convey information that will enable decision making and prescribed suitable action, then good listening precedes effective communication. It can be done by being responsible, having a good attitude towards work and ability to remain calm under crisis situations. Having good communication skills gives an engineer an edge in getting job, managing workload, confidence of presenting himself in a professional manner and ensures that the growth chart of his career as a professional is always rising. Engineers should never hesitate, though, to seize any other opportunities to improve their skills when they find a training course or other learning possibility. The process of learning new skills for career and become better at them should be continuous as with professional development comes opportunities and success.

6. EMPLOYABILITY AND COMMUNICATION

6.1 Employability refers to a person's ability to be qualified and ready for work. In today's scenario, just getting a degree in engineering is not sufficient; an engineer must have the capability to excel in all the fields for a job. An engineer cannot just rely on his degree alone to automatically open doors to success. It certainly unlocks the door up to some extent; it just makes you eligible for the job and not qualified for it. Companies and enterprises today need graduates who are enterprising, adaptable and hard working, having a good degree and qualified with a range of vital skills. Communication skills play an important role in it. In parallel to intellectual development, engineers must focus on communication skills development that elevates to an honourable height. Engineers must focus on principles of communication effectively and enhance their skills. Having good communication skills along with technical skills is a must. These soft skills are complementary to technical skills. Communication skills are a key to success in any field because language used is full of Jargon. Development of communication skills further leads to inter personal skills and finally increasing the chances of employability.

6.2 Communication skills are a way to portray the image of an engineer that helps them to determine their quality. Plato has rightly said "If the intelligent do not want to rule, they have to be prepared to be ruled by fools." Lack of communicative and leadership power lowers the profile of an engineer. An insufficient communication skill not only lowers the employability but also reinforces the negative sides of the engineer. Furthermore, lack of sociable communication contributes to degradation in technical skills as well. Proper speaking and writing skills must be utilised and incorporated to demonstrate the technical knowledge. The golden rule is; Be democratic in decision-making and dictatorial in implementation. The need of the hour is good people with cultivated minds. If an engineer has a different, serviceable and accessible style of communication, the chances of engagement and employability increase. In this era of competitive market, self- actualisation of the speaker and proper communication is ranked as one of the prime characteristics of employable engineer. Listening and understanding, speaking clearly and directly, negotiating responsively, empathising and understanding needs of internal and external customers, ability to persuade, establishment and use of network as well as speaking and writing in English makes an engineer a favourite of the employer as he gains the required technical and communication skills to qualify perfectly for any work.

7. CONCLUSION

Communication enlarges and enlightens our experience; it stimulates and enriches our imagination; it creates a responsibility for accuracy and vividness of statement and thought. The process of exchanging information taking wide varieties of forms through a common system of symbols, facilitating interaction among people is known as communication. In the present scenario, a wide range of skills are required by engineering graduates to lead the professional world. Development of technical knowledge and skills has

been the prime motive of conventional engineering curriculum but today, both written and spoken communication skills are the primary assets for the professionals to get engaged with other professional groups. It is a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment. Effectiveness and efficiency in communication are a must for supervising work, co-ordinating various functions and people and developing products and relations. It gives a modest touch to scroll the major issues and concerns, theories and principles, characteristics and constituents, needs and significance besides the role of learners, engineers, tools and techniques in making the communicative language teaching- learning effective and successful as an approach.

Effective Communication elevates one to an honourable height. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. Communication enlarges and enlightens our experience; it stimulates and enriches our imagination; it creates a responsibility for accuracy and vividness of statement and thought. [9] Communication skills will be around us forever and will continue to thrive and develop as time goes by. These effects on communication skills show that one can interpret different things through one's communication skills. As the world progresses, we will see more people taking more time to develop their skills to their fullest. One will understand to control the effects communication skills causes and how to handle them. [10] Thus, we conclude that an effective communication colours the life as sun colours the flowers. In final analysis it may be affirmed that communication and education are the rocks on which the country builds its democratic salvation; and our country will be built not on bricks but on brains, not on cement but on enlightenment.

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When you can't change the direction of the wind — adjust your sails.

~ H. Jackson Brown