

The Challenges of Teaching and learning English for Engineering Students; Can the IELTS Approach be an alternative?

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Abstract: This paper “The challenges of Teaching and learning English for Engineering Students; Can the IELTS Approach be an alternative?” deals with the problems faced by English teachers and students in engineering colleges and throws light on alternative approach for a professional group of students keeping in view their career. Most of the affiliated colleges need to stick on to the syllabus of their respective Universities. The General English that the students learn at the first year of B.Tech seems to be inadequate in sufficing the needs of the students as employees. Hence many of the non-autonomous Professional colleges opt for the co-curricular activities to improve the skills of the students. The syllabus that is meant for such students should be a comprehensive one focusing on improving their communicative Efficiency by integrating LSRW skills. Apart from this, the major concern is to increase the employability skills of the students. So the verbal ability of the students has to be improved along with their communicative efficiency. Verbal ability coupled with communicative efficiency yields fruitful results. Thus the paper discusses the needs of the targeted students, the syllabus to be taught, and the challenges that are faced in executing it.

I. INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English has never been a criterion for admission to engineering programs in India. Engineering graduates in India face the prospect of substantial unemployment despite high corporate demand for their services despite the growth in international demand; India is facing a significant level of unemployment among its engineers. While statistics show high levels of unemployment among engineers, many large companies complain of difficulties in finding qualified candidates—a “vexing paradox”. This increasing unemployment of engineers in India has been attributed to their limited communication skills and consequently, the teaching of English in engineering education has been under the scanner. It has been found that a number of technically-sound students have not been successful in job interviews just because of their lack of communication skills and there are cases of rank holders in engineering studies who could not go for higher studies to the United States and other English-speaking countries because of their lack of proficiency in English. Just because those students did not get score / band on their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS), they could not make their dream of going to the countries for studies come true.

II. CHALLENGES FOR THE TEACHERS

The present day engineering students are not giving enough importance to English language and they give prior preference to their specialized subjects. So they lack basic language skills, in particular, vocabulary, spoken skills and usage of grammar. As a result, they are unable to satisfy the interviewers in job interviews. So, there is a need to develop their language through the most scientific methods of teaching especially through the newly advanced methods of IELTS. The English teachers of technical institutions face different and difficult problems either academically or non-academically. First of all, the time duration for the completion of the given tasks is not sufficient. The teacher finds few students completing the given task, before the time set, while the slow learners find it difficult to complete it and so expect the teacher to provide answers. The slower students spend three times as much time as the faster students. This is not conducive to learning. Secondly each class has a variety of levels of English proficiency, a variety of interests and a variety of paces of studying. So, it is impossible to lead the students through varied levels of learning, which make the students passive. For these reasons, we need to individualize the study of English in order to get more effective results

A. Lack of motivation

Teaching of English in India has always been a difficult task. This is because of the cultural and social diversities and the lack of human resources. Moreover, individual commitment of the learners in acquiring the language skills is widely lacking, as they lose their flexibility in both body and mind at the age of eighteen at the time of joining colleges. They are distracted in so many ways which drag them away from academics. They run behind the fun and folly and prepare for exams only at the eleventh hour; as a result, they don't learn anything worthy, apart from getting some aggregates and certificates.

B. Limitations of the Exam system

The English exam system in JNTU Hyderabad is not testing the language skills but is testing the memory skill of the students since they read the answers selectively from the prescribed syllabus and recite in the exams. This directly or indirectly conveys that English is an easy subject and does not need any extra efforts to pass the examination. This also is based on possible assumption that the contents in the syllabus are not challenging for the students and so they can come to the exam hall without any practice or preparation. The evaluation system is also responsible for this misconception. Attempting all questions and filling in the pages bring them at least the pass marks. That is how the percentage of passes in the English Papers is higher when compared to the other subjects.

In schools, the contents are memorized and repeated in the examinations. After coming to college, they should at least try to change their learning style. But, this is not happening even in colleges, the English language is taught as a subject. This also de-motivates the students and develops hatred towards learning. According to Sharma, R: "English language teaching in India, you will agree with me, has suffered a lot so much that our students who pass intermediate or degree examinations with English either as a compulsory or as an elective subject can neither speak nor write correct English, may be because the emphasis in our schools and colleges has always been on the conceptual content, and the stylistic content has been neglected so far". This is the reason that the professionals are still lagging behind in accurate speaking and writing.

C. Limitations of the syllabus

Many researchers have an opinion that there is no logic in the prescribed contents of the syllabus since they don't help much towards the achievement of the objectives of the syllabus. The two texts prescribed for 1 year B. Tech. in JNTU are not adequate to teach LSRW skills in the context of professional communication. It has been suggested that traditional syllabuses and materials failed to teach the use of language: what they seem to be doing is teaching the grammar of the language without giving the students knowledge of or practice in – how it is used. Functions, on the other hand, are areas of language where the language is actually used to do things. Teaching and learning the English Language take place with enormous materials and methods.

III. NEW TOOLS TO BE ADOPTED

1. Power point presentations

A lecture session with audiovisual equipment in the classroom allows the teacher to use variety of material effectively. The power point presentation tool enables the instructor to include large volumes of well-organized material, organize the presentations using current software, utilize extensive library of images, move, copy and manipulate information and images, and update presentations as new material are added.

2. Using e-Blogs

Blogging allows anyone to discuss a topic of common interest. It enables anyone to express his or her views and respond to others' opinions. It may be considered virtual conversation between people, where those conversing may not be doing it at the same time or be in the same place.

3. Project based learning

The project based learning allows students to work individually or as a group and work on a project on their own. It gives the students lot more control on the process and the tools used. It also challenges the students to learn and use the concepts, and tools that were essential to complete the project.

IV. THE IELTS METHOD

IELTS general training measures English language proficiency in practical, every day context. The tasks and tests reflect both work place and social situations. In order to take IELTS exam students have to prepare rigorously, the exam system tests the four language skill (LSRW) skills. Getting a good band in IELTS depend on language proficiency of the students. If the IELTS exam pattern is adopted in engineering collages the purpose will be served.

The students gain language skills from the following contexts while preparing for IELTS.

- Listening and responding to spoken language, including simple narratives, statements, questions and single-step instructions
- Communicating basic information, feelings and opinions on familiar topics talk with another person in a familiar situation about familiar topics
- Describing
- Giving opinions
- Giving personal information
- Stating preferences
- Commenting
- Asking for information or descriptions
- Agreeing and disagreeing
- Explaining, giving reasons or justifying
- Deciding
- Suggesting
- Selecting

The tasks in IELTS Life Skills are designed to reflect the everyday experience of communicating in an English-speaking country.

V. CONCLUSION

Teaching and learning the English Language take place with enormous materials and methods, but mastery of English communicative skills seems to depend more on the curiosity and commitment of the learners. Teachers face a difficult task when many students are not wholly motivated to master English. Teachers face challenges such as irrelevant syllabus, heterogeneous media of instruction backgrounds of students, varying levels of English language competition, lack of motivation. Teachers also need to continuously improve their communicative skills in English. Best slogan for all of us could be: “Don’t stop with teaching alone, create a compulsory English speaking environment for the students so that instilling communication skills in the English Language becomes feasible.

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