

EQ SKILLS STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION COMPETENCES

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ABSTRACT: The rapid technological advancement has had a tremendous impact on the traditional social fabric of India. This revolutionary phenomenon brings into focus the human dimension of the engineering enterprise. The significant role of engineering as a discipline is to use scientific knowledge to do useful things for society. Engineering is seen as a bridge between the natural sciences on the one hand and the social sciences on the other. Utilizing skills in emotional intelligence (E Q) can facilitate the development of communication competences, which are considered to be fundamental aspect in the education of engineers by experts. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the global engineer: a person who is mobile across international boundaries and who is not bound by particular paradigms concerning intercultural communication. An in depth study was carried out to ascertain the veracity of the issue with special reference to India. Almost all the students in the first semester of graduation were subjected to rigorous training in emotional intelligence and language lessons while pursuing their engineering course over a period of five consecutive years. After passing out when they got placed in Multinational Companies or large companies it was observed that they fared better than those who had not been trained accordingly. When compared it was found that better communication was one of the prime reasons for this result. Hence enhanced integration of EQ skills in turn improves the work skills of graduates, particular with regards to communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

English has acquired the enviable position of a major link language as a means of globalizing information and technology. It won't be an exaggeration if we identify English as the language of science. India with a population of more than a billion is the largest English speaking country in the world; where scientists and technocrats rely solely on English as the medium of communication. According to the All India Council of Technical Education the number of technical schools in India including engineering colleges has more than tripled in the last ten years. The knowledge of English has become critical for an engineer who wants efficiency in his workplace. With computers, computer software, interactive information technology, satellites, and communication of a very advanced kind making a unique impact on us and our everyday lives, the parameters of communication are evolving in a way that was practically unimaginable till a few years ago. Thus English is the medium of instruction in almost all the technical institutions. A study revealed that almost thirty percent students in engineering came from schools where the medium of instruction was other than English

Educational institutions-aware of the demand for communication skills-try to supply graduates with some degree of competence in communication , however, many demands compete for the students' attention; new topics work their way into the curriculum and new teaching methods are explored. One result is that for several decades the verbal skills of high school graduates have been slipping. Concern also exists about the skills of college graduates. A recent report from the Carnegie Foundation for the advancement of Teaching takes a clear stand on communication. "The foundation for successful undergraduate experience is proficiency in the written and spoken word." [1] It has been observed that communication skills can be taught relatively quickly and are not particularly difficult to acquire, especially when a person has a solid foundation in the basics. When the students are bright and motivated, and the skills being taught are tailored to them, the improvement can be dramatic. [2] One of the problems confronting the Indian learners is that there is no 'one to one correspondence' between letters and sounds in English as it is in many Indian languages. "This is the reason why many Indians find it difficult to learn English pronunciation," observes M. Ashraf Rizvi. [3]

The communication professor is confronted with a number of challenges in an engineering college in India. Usually students are taught in heterogeneous groups in the same class; consequently, there is the same curriculum for the communication skills subject for English speakers as for non-English speaking students. Secondly the communication skills class is introduced only for the first year students, and that based only on theoretical assessments, students lack a sufficient level of oral communication skill required after graduation. It has been observed that as far as the performance in the technical subject is concerned the non-English speaking students many times excel. The problem ,therefore, becomes all the more acute, the teacher has to see that the gap has to be bridged quickly before the shortcoming takes shape into a permanent feeling of inferiority complex consequently affecting the overall progress in the academics. Over the years it was observed that non-English speaking students have some common difficulties interacting with the English speakers. Most of them felt uncertain as far as the fluency was concerned.[4] The biggest deterrent according to a study revealed that talking in front of the class was a leading fear. A key aspect of speaker coaching is to initially remove that fear factor in order to release anxiety in the voice. Another common feature observed was that the degree of hesitation increased when they interacted with the members of the opposite sex. The study also brought to light that motivation could be effective in removing shyness. In fact after deliberations three basic deterrents could be broadly identified

1. The problem of achieving accuracy in communicating the message.
2. The problem of ensuring that the message conveys the desired meaning.
3. The problem of ensuring that the received meaning affects behavior in the desired way. Some other problems that could be observed were variations in listening skills, variations in language skills, complexity of subject matter, time restraint, personal biases, responding to difficult questions and side-stepping sensitive issues.

In oral communication, words should be carefully chosen. Words both denote and connote a meaning.[5] Three sources of weakness that significantly impact on an engineering communication skills education were identified as-

1. Students' attitude to communication,
2. Insufficient course contents,
3. Deficient or inappropriate teaching methods.

Subjecting such learners to regular exercises and written assignments did not result in any significant improvement. Knowledge of English language was not the main issue, in fact these learners suffered from being unable to understand their emotions and that of the others, which stood as a barrier between the two groups. It was thought that if they were exposed to situations that improved their emotional intelligence (EQ) it would surely enable effective communication. Emotional Intelligence can be described as the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationship.[6] Unlike IQ which is difficult to change EQ can be developed through training and education. "Strong emotions also affect the verbal and non-verbal symbols we put up for others. We may mouth or jot down the right words, but the non verbal symbols that reflect our strong emotions may contradict them. Strong emotions may make us say or do things we won't when we are not under their spell. What this means is that we put up verbal and non-verbal symbols without meaning to." [7] "Self centeredness makes some of us so myopic that we can't see beyond our noses. On the other hand some of us can see the speck in other people's eyes but can't see the bean in our own eyes. Even if we escape such pathological dimension, varying degrees of self centeredness can seriously weaken our role as communicators and communicates." [8].

Methodology

In order to encounter the first problem it was necessary that these learners be inducted to certain sessions of inspiring exercises. Examples from the lives of great achievers be made part of the reading material, hence lessons on great living successful personalities such as the President of the country etc. were added. In view of the growing importance of English as a tool for global communication and the consequent emphasis on training students to acquire communication competence, the syllabus was designed to develop linguistic and communicative competence of Engineering students. The prescribed books and exercises were meant to serve broadly as students' handbook. The focus was on the skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking with the objective of improving language proficiency. For making it motivational the students were asked to prepare role models for them selves and figure out the qualities that had appealed to them the most in each personality. It was time and again pointed out that the achievers had good communication skill as a common factor although they had not come from any English speaking background. This had great impact on the minds of the learners as they could identify and relate themselves with them. Exercises in confidence building such as jotting down three things that they possessed as positive qualities instilled a kind of faith in themselves.. Another very useful exercise was to ask the learners to praise their partners. Such interactions brought a sense of belongingness and paved the way for better communication. Decision making exercises that are actually structured problem solving exercises were presented to the learners as a series of tasks viz.:

- Identifying the problem
- Understanding the problem
- Finding solutions
- Summing up

The exercises were based upon a set of prepared resources, including newspaper reports and statistics about the subjects. These were provided as background readings in the decision making exercises.

Exercises on self awareness such as observing the feelings, expressing them in words, finding relationships between thoughts and feelings were of great result in making the learners more expressive. Special emphasis was given on keeping an eye on terms that conveyed negative messages unintentionally. Questions relating to controlling anger and fear gave the learners an opportunity to put emotions under control. One of the most difficult part was the question of handling stress. It was observed that the Engineering students were always under pressure one of the reasons being the tight academic schedule and the self imposed stress of making it to the top. Handling stress for such learners who were already burdened with the language barrier was an uphill task for the professors. One of the most successful techniques was to make them practice meditation for fifteen minutes by constantly observing the incoming breath and the outgoing breath with eyes closed.

All the exercises just discussed were very helpful in removing fear and handling stress and emotions as far as the oral communication was concerned.

In order to overcome the written communication the first task was to make the learners write an assignment on a given situation or topic where engineers were shown to working for the benefit of the society such as Air-pollution and its remedy etc. Regular written assignments and their appraisals did show a remarkable improvement. Exercises on one word substitution, abridging sentences passages for comprehension and phonetic drills showed good results. Books such as Brush up your English by S.T. Imam., The Students 'Companion by W. D. Best., English Grammar and Composition by Wren Martin., some selected pieces of prose and short stories were recommended for further consultation .The list included writings of Stephen Hawking (A Brief History Of Time), Vernor Steffen Vinge (A Fire Upon The Deep), Charles Kingsley (The Water Babies), Rabindranath Tagore (Short Stories), Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr A.P.J.Kalam, Ruskin Bond, Lewis, Hedwig[SJ]:Body Language, A Guide for Professionals[New Delhi]

Often the length of a sentence would pose problems for such learners . ”Technical Communication can be full of ideas and facts. Shorter sentences are usually easier to understand than long and complicated sentences. Critics agree that sentences over 25 words are too long for most readers to understand. However , use this as guide not as rule. A paragraph consisting only of short sentences will sound choppy and artificial; sometimes the relationship between ideas gets lost when sentences are too short. Compare the following sentences:

The bird flew into the yard. The cat was waiting. The cat was in the shadow. The tree had the shadow.

These sentences are too short and too much alike. When the bird flew into the yard, the cat was waiting in the tree's shadow." [9]

Examples such as the above proved useful in explaining the idea. In order to assist the learners to write a research paper books that were available were introduced.' [10]

CONCLUSION

Utilizing skills in emotional intelligence (E Q) can facilitate the development of communication competencies, which are considered to be fundamental aspect in the education of engineers, especially by senior international engineering bodies. EQ impacts significantly on the acquisition and expression of communication skills, including listening skills.

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