

QEEE Spoken English Bridge Course for the Enhancement of Communication Skills in Engineering Graduates

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Abstract- The QEEE (Quality Enhancement in Engineering Education) team conducted a Bridge Course in Spoken English from August 2014 to November 2014 with an aim to augment communication and professional skills of engineering students across the nation. BMS College of Engineering had been actively involved in the Programme. The present paper offers an overview of the Programme throwing light on the Course Content, Programme Outcome and the Course Outcome of the Bridge Course. It also reflects how the Bridge course could be instrumental in leading the Engineering students to accomplish excellence in Technical Communication.

Keywords-Engineering Education, Spoken English professional skills, Bridge Course, Programme Outcome and Course Outcome, Technical Communication.

1. Introduction

Engineering graduates require an ever-increasing range of skills to maintain and sustain themselves in the global and multicultural environment of the new millennium. Communication skills are considered an essential component of this by the academia and industry. English Language skills also gain impetus in this regard due to its widespread status across the globe. A good command over English language can certainly enhance an Engineering Graduate's EQ as much as his/her IQ which is pursued via other Technical subjects and make him/her a confident global engineer. 'English for specific purposes' focuses on equipping the learner with adequate technical jargon and communication skills required to get into the industry-domestic or international. Globalization directly influences industry's needs; a global engineer must be able to easily cross national and cultural boundaries. [1] Therefore, engineering education institutions must impart Technical communication skills quintessentially to meet the language requirements of the new global engineer and prepare its graduates to face the new millennium.

Technical communication involves a dynamic inter-textuality among the three important aspects: subject competence, communication competence and organizational competence. [2] The technical knowledge and skill sans communication competence are of little use. All the activities an organization undertakes have communication at their hub and therefore, the better one's communication skills, the

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greater are his/her chances of quick progress in the ladder of success.

Sensing the above-mentioned significance of communication tutelage in Engineering course, The QEEE team, ably supported by the MHRD, harbingered a Spoken English Bridge Course via A-View platform. Initially, the QEEE Team, IIT Madras conducted "Local Faculty Training Workshop for the Spoken English Course" on 23 July 2014 at ADI Seminar Hall, IIT Madras. BMS College of Engineering was represented by Prof. Vanishree B.N in the programme. The resource person was Dr. Vineeta Prasad, a QEEE Team Member, IITD. Addressing the group of nearly 25 participants from different states of India, the Trainer discussed the initiative taken by the MHRD to improve Quality of Education in Technical Colleges in all technical and allied areas including English Communication. She further reflected on the influence of American English on British English and discussed the importance of retaining the sanctity of British English by teaching neutral accent and intonation, correct spellings and the correct words to students. Brain-storming sessions on various factors that hinder even the professionals in IT industry from speaking English fluently and confidently were considered. She ignited a group discussion on common problems the Trainers of English language faced. Dr. Prasad informed the participant faculty to be the coordinator/ the facilitator conducting a Pre-Course Assessment and guiding students during the training. She gave the Trainees hands-on training in conducting the Assessment.

2. Topics Covered

The Online Spoken English Course of 10 sessions was held between August 2014 and November 2014. In the introductory session, Dr. Prasad elucidated the significance and relevance of communication skills in general and English communication in particular for an engineer who aspires to carry out his/her professional practice in the global arena. She conveyed to the participants of various colleges around the nation that engineering communication skills basically constitute several core elements such as the fluency in English; the fundamentals of oral and visual communication; verbal and non-verbal communication skills and job skills and professional etiquette/mannerism.

A. Basics of English Language

Dr. Prasad highlighted the rudiments of Language

acquisition and learning such as pronunciation-mouth movement training and articulation of consonants. How Unvoiced consonants-t,p,k,s and f are produced entirely by the use of tongue, lips and teeth, without needing to engage the vocal chords to make the sounds and how their Voiced counterparts-d,b,g,z,v are produced in the same way, with the simple addition of engaging the vocal chords were taught with a set of words for the participants to practice.

The following session had a discussion on the production and articulation of twenty vowel sounds and the participants were thoroughly drilled in some confusing sets of words such as 'plough', 'rough', 'laugh' and 'dough' wherein the sound unit "ough" represents different sounds.

B. Indianism - A threat to Career

The succeeding session triggered a discussion on an interesting issue in English, i.e, Indianism. The English language has evolved over the centuries, incorporating word and phrase usages from around the world. Each year, the Oxford English Dictionary adds new words to keep up with the changing times. Indianism refers to how a regional word or a phrase has had its way into English dictionary and becomes characteristic of Indian English, such as the words 'shaadi' and 'bazaar'. Indianism also refers to the way a sentence is structured as it is literally translated from an Indian language to English. Some examples of Indianism are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Indianism Vs Correct English

<i>Indianism</i>	<i>Correct English</i>
Are you having a car?	Do you have a car?
Myself Suman.	I am Suman.
We will discuss about the problems.	We will discuss the problems.
May I know your good name?	May I know your name?
I am angry on you.	I am angry with you.
Put a mail.	Write a mail.
Me and my friend went out	My friend and I went out.
Preponement	Advancement
Repeat again	Repeat
Do one thing.	Do this.
He is eating my brain.	He is really bothering me.
Xerox copy	Photocopy

Indianism is an essential criterion to judge the candidate's language competence while hiring candidates for IT companies, especially if the job is BPO in nature which involves personal and telephone interaction with international parties. Indianism may cause miscommunication between our professionals

and the client resulting in serious issues. The hiring companies assess and filter candidates based on their usage of Indianism. Therefore, it is very essential to avoid such expressions of Indianism and to make use of correct English.

C. Errors in the Use of Parts of Speech

The next couple of sessions ushered in a discussion on 'nouns' and 'articles' through the mistakes often committed in English conversation. Mistakes such as omitting the definite article 'the' before a word that expresses superlative degree, before the ordinal numbers and before the name of a river, an ocean, an association, a group of nations and the title of magazine or a newspaper were discussed. The wrong usage of indefinite article 'a' with words that have consonant letter but a vowel sound in the beginning and the wrong usage of 'an' with words which have a vowel letter but a consonant sound in the beginning were discussed at length. Omission of articles with reference to proper nouns and words that cannot be quantified was also a part of the discussion. The exercises practiced helped the students to overcome the above-mentioned mistakes.

The next session opened up a discussion on using correct 'prepositions' and 'adjectives'. There were many queries from the participants about indicating the right time and space through prepositions. Lots of examples helped the participants overcome the commonly-made mistakes with regard to prepositions and adjectives.

D. Mastering Fluency

The instructor expressed that just like grammar and vocabulary, fluency in English is a mark of a learned person. Fluency helps one sell his/her ideas, communicate his/her thoughts to others, convince, reach out, and even impress with a speech that is clear, confident, to the point and crisp. One can improve fluency in English only by talking and formulating thoughts in English. One needs to go about learning a new language just like he/she learnt the mother tongue. Listening and repeating the expressions help the learners improve their fluency in English remarkably. The Trainer further offered a few tips to improve fluency:

- Listening carefully
- Reading aloud

- Talking in English as much as possible
- Recording one's own voice
- Role-playing/ practicing the conversation [3]



Fig 1: Techniques to improve fluency

The mental block or the fear of using wrong expressions and grammar can also be a hindrance for fluency. It means that the thought 'I am poor in verbal expression' can make the speaker stammer. So do not just talk. Talk confidently. Talk to convince. Talk to take people by storm [4]. That is how one can improve English. Once this mental block clears, the learner's fluency will improve on its own. The Trainer encouraged the participants to believe in themselves and not to shy away from mistakes. They should consider their mistakes seriously and vow not to repeat the mistakes ever again.

E. Job Skills and Recruitment

The discussion on Résumé Writing by the Trainer received a wonderful response from the participants. The Trainer expressed that one of the biggest challenges for most administrative professionals searching for a job is creating a compelling Résumé. She further reflected on Dos and Don'ts of Résumé Writing and expressed how a good and sound Résumé can fetch an apt and attractive job. Mentioning the career objective clearly is an essential part of a Résumé. A sample Résumé was displayed to illustrate the features of a good Résumé.



Fig 2: Exploring Job Opportunities

Presentation skills were another major discussion in the training. Apart from the subject canon of a good presentation, other non-verbal canons such as kinesics, proxemics, chronemics and paralinguistic factors that have to be observed by a presenter were also delineated with examples. Barriers of communication such as the unpreparedness of the speaker, inappropriateness of the topic, unwelcoming mindset of the audience, the mood of the speaker, insufficient light, loud noise around, strong smell can hinder effective communication [5].

The Trainer also elucidated various career opportunities, job advertisements on jobsites, targeted mailing-networks and referrals and information about the recruiters and job consultants. Preparing the participants for the Interview questions, their dressing and other kinds of grooming; mannerism and etiquette was also the Trainer's concern in the remaining sessions.



Fig 3: Exploring Job Opportunities

3. Conclusion

To conclude, English communication integrated with soft skills should be treated as an integral part of engineering education. Only those Institutions which have already implemented such advanced communication elements in the curricula can generate full-fledged technocrats and professionals to industry/society.

In this view, the Spoken English Bridge Course conducted by the QEEE team is a commendable attempt to enlighten the participants about the relevance of communication in English in the

professional life and how sound linguistic competence plays as a vehicle to carry them towards a challenging career and fetches them high prospects. It also alerted them about the non-verbal, paralinguistic factors, mannerism and professional etiquette, body language and dress sense that contribute a lot in the making of a complete professional in the industry. It is strongly felt that the students of BMS College of Engineering, who attended the Bridge course are now better informed about the characteristics of good communication and have thus, indirectly improved their soft skills and hence, are better equipped to face the real-world situation. It is felt that they will certainly incorporate what they have learnt from the Bridge Course in future during Placements and will have better chances of pursuing a great career than others in the competitive Industry.

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