

## English for Engineering Students in Bhopal: Analysis and Remedies

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Having good command on English has become the primary requisite for any modern day professional. A qualified engineer today should be well versed with this global language. He should be having a good knowledge and competence of this language. Researchers have revealed that graduate engineers fail miserably to fulfill the basic requirements of modern day organizations as they are not having a good hold on the basic skills of language. Without proper communication, they are not able to fulfill their professional needs. To overcome this problem they need to develop their communicative skills properly so as to make them cooperate and communicate with different people from different part of the world in the most efficient manner.

In Bhopal, avenues for higher technical education remained inadequate until the mid-nineteen eighties. The establishment of the Rajiv Gandhi Proudyogiki University, Bhopal heralded the dawn of engineering studies in the city as well as state. Later on, the university gave affiliation to 222 engineering colleges. A large number of colleges of engineering, pharmacy, science and technology as well as the polytechnics are affiliated to this university and the university is considered to be the 28<sup>th</sup> largest university in the world in terms of number of students enrolled. Around ten engineering colleges out of about three hundred such colleges affiliated to RGTU have a good placement record. Most of the final year undergraduate students of these colleges are recruited by reputed IT and core engineering companies. In some of these

colleges more than 90 per cent of the students are placed and recruiters attribute the success of the students to their ability to communicate well and think clearly. The on-campus recruitment process consists of three or four stages:

- 1) Aptitude test
- 2) Technical interview
- 3) Group discussion, and
- 4) HR interview.

The engineering colleges of Bhopal affiliated to RGTU, follow the Communicative English course and Business English or Professional English course for enhancing the language skills of engineering students at the undergraduate level. In most cases, it is either a two or a three semester course, comprising of both theory and practical classes. In some deemed universities or colleges like NIT the colleges have the liberty to introduce it either in the first year (in either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2nd semester) or in the second year (either in 3rd or 4th semester) of the engineering programme. There are summative assessments for the two-credit theory papers and for the two credit lab course, the performance of the students in the laboratory is assessed and credits recorded and forwarded to the University.

The goals and objectives of the course as noted in the syllabus are furnished below for better understanding:

- ▶ To develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

- ▶ To cultivate the habit of reading newspapers, magazines and books to consolidate the skills already achieved.
- ▶ To familiarize the students with the sounds of English (Phonetics) in a nutshell.
- ▶ To provide adequate listening and speaking practice so that the learners can speak with ease, fluency and clarity in common everyday situations and on formal occasions.

Similarly, the Business English course sets its objectives as the following:

- ▶ To prepare the students to various written communications like reports, letters etc.
- ▶ To make notes or summarize documents, organize meetings, prepare agenda, draft resolutions, write minutes of meetings, make oral presentations.

The study covers the teaching-learning process of English language in government-funded institutions of engineering in Bhopal along with self-financing colleges affiliated to RGTU. The course contents and credit system of government-funded institutes differ slightly from that of the colleges affiliated to RGTU. Though the students are supposed to be admitted through Entrance Examination which has various categories of listing according to caste and region but due to large number of private colleges the entrance examination loses its meaning and is replaced by direct admission mode. As a result the students with least hold on English language also gets admission without anybody stopping them. Every college enrolls mixed ability students from different castes and regions.

The target groups included students from different semesters, representing a cross-section of undergraduates. Colleges for the field work were selected randomly as it is impossible to visit all the colleges which numbers in hundreds. The target groups included learners from urban,

semi- urban and remote areas of Bhopal. Questionnaire survey among teachers and students of different semesters, discussion with teachers and focused interview involving students constitute the various tools for data collection. The data collection was done personally, in classroom situations, by visiting the colleges and interacting with teachers, students and authorities concerned.

### **Colleges Selected for Field work**

I selected ten colleges from Bhopal city to carry out this research work. The colleges were selected randomly not on any particular basis. All the colleges are affiliated to RGTU, Bhopal. They are as under.

1. Government Engineering colleges (established in 1988) now known as University Institute of Technology.
2. Technocrats Institute of Technology, Bhopal.
3. Bansal College of Engineering, Bhopal.
4. Shree institute of Science and Technology, Bhopal.
5. Oriental College of Technology, Bhopal.
6. Bhaba Engineering Research Institute.
7. VNS Institute of Technology.
8. All Saints College of Technology.
9. Millennium Institute of Technology.
10. Sam College of Engineering and Technology.

In today's world, where the students would be competing for job positions with a global workforce, it would be their English language proficiency that would be tested to the

maximum, as English is the most widely spoken language in the world at present. Therefore, in order to facilitate engineering learning and to keep pace with the latest trends in the field of science and technology, they require an adequate level of reading and comprehension skills in English. An assessment of their language competence becomes crucial not only to refine their language skills but also to improve their technical knowledge. 'Just as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language teaching program should be designed without thorough needs analysis'(Long, 2005,p.1). The perspectives of the learners and teachers have been taken into account to find out the advantages and disadvantages of the English syllabus followed in engineering colleges of Bhopal. Though the syllabus is designed in a good manner to some extent yet the teachers and the students are unable to cover it fully and that later on results in inefficiency of speaking English and also lack of confidence overcomes the students after graduation as they find it difficult to learn the skills at this stage which they have not learnt during graduation. The syllabus for engineering students of Bhopal city covers aspects like Linguistic techniques, Modern usages, Reading comprehension, English phonetic symbols/signs, Oral presentation, Audition Communication, Processes of Communication, Verbal and Non Verbal Communication, Writing of definitions of Engineering terms, Objects, Processes and Principles (Listening) Topics of General Interest, Reproduction from business, daily life, travel, health, buying and selling, company structure, systems, Applications, Enquiry, Calling quotations, Tenders, Order and Complaint, Precise Writing, Noting and drafting, Technical Description of simple engineering objects and processes (writing), Report writing, precise writing, Note writing, Slogan writing comment, Speech advertising.

However, the acquisition of speaking skills in classroom situation is far from satisfactory in the existing scenario in the engineering colleges of Bhopal. In large theory classes where lecturing method is still practiced, there is little scope to impart practice in speaking. In the practical classes, this can be attempted, but in the absence of well-equipped language laboratories with logistics like movable chairs, individual headphones, relevant software and computer systems, speaking practices remain elusive. Here the teacher-centric instructions, without regular speaking practice, cannot achieve the desired level. Most of the teachers have neither acquired Standard English pronunciation themselves nor are they able to access the latest pronunciation improvement software due to lack of adequate funds and administrative apathy. The teachers themselves need to be provided with adequate resources and training to impart superior language teaching practices demanded of the course for their students (Tickoo, 2004).

Reading practice can be imparted in the practical classes to some degree, but time limitations to cover the given syllabus create hurdles quite often. The students can only be guided to attain this habit and the students themselves have to show interest by reading books and materials of their preference.

Writing skills can be imparted properly in the practical classes provided the teacher is prepared to take extra effort to identify common mistakes in the assignments and get it corrected within the limited time that a teacher gets in a particular semester. Through peer feedback, the students could also be encouraged to avoid mistakes. Creating interest in students to write good English becomes essential for implementing it in their future work environments. In this connection, the remarks of Bright & McGregor (1978) seem pertinent:

Skills can be achieved only through practice, which is something we cannot do for our pupils. They have got to do it for themselves, which means that the good teacher of language, even more than the teacher of other subjects, should spend a great deal of his time, listening, reading and *not talking*. Of course, he/she will have to talk quite a lot, but his pupils have got to talk and read and write very much more, under his guidance, if they are to make progress (p.4).

It is being reported that it is difficult for Indian engineering professionals to get work in the global scenario. Considering the adverse comments and criticism from the various stakeholders regarding the lack of adequate English proficiency among our students it becomes important to conduct needs analysis of the learners in from the first year of their engineering itself.

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