

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
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**STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE STUDENTS OF ENGINEERING COLLEGES IN INDIA**

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INADEQUATE ENGLISH SKILLS AMONG RURAL STUDENTS

It is commonly noticed and commented upon that many engineering graduates in Tamilnadu, while facing campus interviews, fail to converse in English freely with the recruiters, and thus they fail to get the most coveted jobs. Technically, these graduates have a sound knowledge of their majors, but when the conversation part comes, they fail to perform well.

Communication may take place through interviews, presentations, and written documents. But the basis for the communication is often the general mode of **conversation**. Among all the other modes, conversation is the most important means of communication. Conversation is the way to influence others and to be influenced by others. Conversation helps us to develop our relationship with others. Conversations are not simply exchange of words. They include non-verbal communication, which is, often, performed and perceived unconsciously.

INCREASE IN YEARS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION NO HELP!

In spite of learning English for more than 12 years as a subject, engineering students in the rural parts of Tamilnadu find it difficult to communicate their views in English. Their English idiom is still heavily influenced by their mother tongue. They have a very thick accent. Their sentence construction is faulty, and their speech is full of pronunciation errors, which make it often difficult to comprehend what they actually try to communicate. Leading linguistics scholars in Tamilnadu have pointed out that the main reason for this condition is that children are taught

English as a subject and not as a language. Children also learn English as a subject and not as a living language that is used for practical purposes and for professional communication. They learn the rules of grammar, but they are not skilled in applying such rules in active language use. Rote learning of grammar rules, passive knowledge of the vocabulary, insufficient vocabulary, inability to pronounce the words clearly, and inappropriate use of vocabulary mark their production of English utterances. They feel shy to speak in English, as the environment does not seem to encourage communication in English. While at the same time their Tamil is full of phrases from English.

ACQUISITION OF BILINGUAL SKILLS



In order for any child to become bilingual, it is important that the child receive meaningful exposure to two languages. For many children, this happens naturally when there are two languages necessary for the child to negotiate in his or her environment. For example, children from Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, or Urdu speaking families learn to use Tamil with ease when exposed to the Tamil environment outside their homes. However, for the acquisition of bilingual skills in English for most children, a determined strategy must be implemented to provide better access to the language in the school environment. This is not done consciously in the schools in Tamilnadu and this results in faulty learning and use of English at this stage, which is carried over to the college level.

To overcome this situation, we need to introduce effective communication opportunities to all engineering students and insist on credible and demonstrable success in these opportunities.

WHAT IS MEANT BY EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

Effective communication is not talking mindlessly nor is it just passing the information to each other. The communicator has to enable the listener understand her intent and purpose of the

communicated message more or less in the same way she has intended it to be understood. It involves both the sender of the message and the receiver. The message may often be misinterpreted if they are not communicated effectively. In fact, a message is successful only when both the sender and the receiver perceive it in the same way.

HOW TO MAKE OUR COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVE?



Firstly, we should have a good understanding of what we want to convey and then make others understand it in the same way we have understood it. So, let us first understand the matter and then clarify the objective. Objective is nothing but what we want to achieve. The matter to be communicated has to be understood first and then arranged logically. Then to bring the ideas alive in the listeners mind, we have to use the words to create pictures and feelings that will stimulate their senses as well as their brain. Words may often be forgotten, but not the images. So if we want our ideas to stick, we must stamp them in the listener's mind in some non-verbal form.

Fluency, rather than correct and grammatical speech, is our goal in the beginning stage.

The first step to become a good communicator is to be a good listener. Once this listening skill is initiated within the student, the student may start to express her/his thoughts, ideas and feeling thereby responding to the communication of others, which enables the students to participate in social communication successfully. Therefore both listening and speaking (Oral language) provide foundation for the development of other language skills like reading and writing.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER AS FACILITATOR OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Teachers play a vital role in developing communication skills in students. The best way to encourage communication skills is through *classroom discussion*. To have good discussion,

teachers should create an opportunity and encourage the students to speak and explore their own thinking. The teachers should nurture an affirming environment where students feel free to express themselves without fear.

While encouraging meaningful discussion, it is crucial that students should be given plenty of time to respond and think about what they want to say. Students should be made to realize that their goal is not only to speak and share their thinking but also to learn and develop new ideas and new interpretation of older ideas, through speech.

The teacher should also be a responsible listener to students' talk. Teachers should establish strategies to manage all forms of communication to ensure all students have fair and equitable opportunities to develop their interpersonal speaking and listening skills.

Debate is another way teachers can provide their students with the opportunity to practice their communication skills. Debate helps students to develop convincing arguments, and allows teachers and students to learn from one another.

Logical communication is very important at the college level, and especially for those who wish to pursue excellence in their careers. Ideas and strategies relating to **critical thinking** should be integrated with the Effective Communication classes.

HOW TO CAPTIVATE AUDIENCE WITH OUR PRESENTATION?

One has to keep the audience in mind before going for the presentation of our work to that audience. Today's audiences have short attention spans. Their fingers are always on the remote control, moving from one TV channel to another, at times without any purpose.

While delivering any matter, care should be taken to see whether the matter is appropriate for the audience. Many presentations fail not because the presenter is weak, but because the matter being conveyed is not arranged properly. The audience tries its utmost to understand, but gets lost. Therefore **shaping and sharpening** of the ideas is very important before communicating.

Talking about audience, firstly the presenter has to analyze the audience and then the audience has to be controlled. Many presenters fail to understand that their body movements send more important messages to the audience than their tongue. So, presenters should avoid making the same movements or gestures over and over again. It is very important for the presenter to practice a variety of movements and not repeat the same gestures over and over again. At the same time the gestures should not be too extraordinary. The same is applicable to facial expressions and movements of the presenter on the platform.

Apart from the gestures, **Voice inflections** of the speech are vital. The way the speaker pronounces words can weaken the presentation. A pause at the right moment is more effective than anything else for the speech. A presenter with his controlled gestures, confident articulation can enliven his or her talk with humour in the minds of the audience. Humorous personal story pertinent to the talk will always freshen up the minds of the audiences and will easily remembered.

SEVEN PROVEN STRATEGIES TO MAKE YOUR PRESENTATION A SUCCESSFUL ONE:

- Effective understanding
- Clarify your objective
- Structure your thinking
- Manage your time
- Create the situation for the listeners
- Summarize often
- Use visuals

TO SUMMARIZE

Effective communication depends on how we use our verbal and non-verbal skills. If we want to be effective in using English for our communication purposes, we need to have a fairly well grounded ability to speak English, and also manipulate the vocabulary appropriately along with clear pronunciation. This can be achieved through conscious training.

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