

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 7 July 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

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English for Engineering Students A Discussion and Some Practical Suggestions for Syllabus Construction

G. Immanuel, M.A., Ph.D. Research Scholar

Certain Items That We Should Keep in Mind

Teachers of English should keep the growing need for English skills in mind while designing the English syllabus and in adapting the right methodology of teaching English to technical students. English is no longer a subject in the curriculum but an indispensable learning tool.

Since teachers deal with technical students it doesn't mean that only Technical English has to be taught. Technical English for Technical Students - is it simply a fancy? Or does Technical English Teaching (TET) for Engineering Students develop the communicative capability of the technical graduates? What is the objective of Technical English introduced in the curriculum of Anna University? Does the syllabus serve the purpose for which it was framed? What is the end result of it? Where should the change be?

**THE SYLLABUS OF ANNA UNIVERSITY CHENNAI (BE/BTECH) –
R2008/AFFILIATED INSTITUTIONS COMMON SYLLABUS –
First YEAR – HS2111 TECHNICAL ENGLISH:**

Aim

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To encourage students to actively involve in participative learning of English and to help them acquire Communicative Skills.

Unit- I Focus on Language (24)

Tenses – Word-Formation with prefixes and Suffixes – Same word used as different parts of speech – Active and Passive Voice – ‘If’ conditionals – Reference and link words – Compounds nouns – Adjectives – numerical adjectives – Comparative adjectives – Modals – Subject-verb agreement- Reporting verbs (direct and indirect) – Relative pronouns – preposition- prepositional phrases – phrasal verbs – Question types – Cause and effect – Infinitives and gerunds – Imperatives

Unit – II Listening (20)

Listening for general content – Listening for specific information – Listening for note-taking – Listening and make inferences – Listening to recorded telephone conversations – Listening tp reports and audio texts.

Unit – III Speaking (20)

Pronunciation – Accent – Eliciting information – Self and peer introduction – Conversation practice in different situations – Oral presentations on various topics – Debates – Describing.

Unit – IV Reading (24)

Predicting the content – Skimming the text for gist – Scanning for specific information – Analysing and interpreting information from bar charts, flow charts, pie charts etc. Logical sequencing of sentences – Study reading – Extensive reading (reading general texts).

Unit V Writing (32)

One sentence definition and extended definition – Paragraph writing – principles of writing a paragraph – report writing : industrial visit / accident/ progress report/ feasibility report/ -Project proposal – Formal Letters: Letter to the editor / job application with resume/ letter calling for quotations/ placing orders/ making complaints – recommendations – instructions – Checklists.

For the Internal Assessment and End Semester Examination the following pattern will be adopted:

Unit I – Focus on Language : End semester – Part – A (10 questions).

Unit II – Listening - Speaking : These two units will be covered in Internal.

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Unit – III – Speaking Assessment as per regulation 2008 (as applicable to lab based theory)

Unit – IV – Reading: End Semester – Part-B (2 Questions)

- i) Reading Comprehension (Question 11)
- ii) One more question from the same unit.

Unit V – Writing: End Semester – Part B (3 Questions) (120 Periods)

(indiastudycenter.com)

Are we able to achieve the said aims practically?

The components stated under Unit-I impart basic knowledge of grammatical elements in English. However these elements have been taught from the fourth standard in the State Board syllabus. In the CBSE syllabus, these basic elements are taught from the first standard level. So roughly students are exposed to such basics for an average of 7 years. I feel it doesn't make any sense in teaching the same basics again at the collegiate level for the engineering students. May be the syllabus might be framed keeping in mind the rural learners but the question is what about students with the English background? Won't it be a repetition since nothing significant for the use of English is focused upon here?

As English teachers what are we supposed to do? What kind of methodology are we supposed to follow?

Analysing Unit – II Listening (20)

The syllabus calls for lessons to develop the listening capability of the students and to expose them to the fields of Listening-Understanding, Listening-Speaking, Listening-Reading and Listening-Writing. But here too English teachers face a very critical problem - the so-called “Examination Point of View Teaching (EPVT)” and “Hundred Percentage Result Gaining Teaching (HPRGT).”

- Are we really serious about developing listening skills of the students?
- Do technical students realize the importance of listening in their first year?
- Are we teachers taking conscious initiative to make students understand the significance of listening?
- Do Self-financing Engineering Colleges provide well-equipped language labs with many listening components?

Analysing Unit – III Speaking (20)

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Enough components and activities are available to enable students to start practicing speaking skills.

- Do our students express themselves? How can they be helped to overcome their initial reluctance?
- Are we teachers competent enough to introduce new activities which make students express themselves without being self-conscious?
- Do we teachers embrace a Silent Class where students are not allowed to express themselves or speak?

Unit – IV Reading (24)

When one hears the word *reading*, what strikes the mind of the teacher is Reading Comprehension. Teachers generally give many passages with few questions to the students and permit them to answer the question by themselves. What happens is the students accept and get involved in the process of reading the text without understanding the concept and the context of it. They answer the questions for the sake of answering and the final result is irrelevant utterances.

- Does this practice make a student a good reader?
- Do teachers play a predominant role with respect to imparting reading skills?
- As teachers do we have patience to allow our students to read a text or a passage and correct their errors in reading and also to permit our students to reflect on it?

Unit – V Writing (32)

The components prescribed under Unit – V are the most essential ones for a technical student to imbibe and also they are useful in day-to-day life. We teachers definitely give much prominence to writing and also we try to render our “hundred percentage” efforts to teach students the components prescribed under this Unit as at least some competence students must have to pass the examinations in all the subjects they study. Even in developing writing skills:

- Do we move forward further to attract students to increase their writing capability by providing them opportunities to write something over above what is not prescribed or mandated in a course?

Effectiveness of the Syllabus

With a “comprehensive” syllabus like this, are we able to produce good communicators? Or, in other words, are we enabling students to improve their performance in all the four skills?

Sources of Problems

1. English teachers would have studied English literature up to the post-graduate level. Some would have done their post-doctoral research before they become

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English teachers. If these English teachers are asked to handle literature classes, they would do it with much enthusiasm and teach literature with great interest and competence. But, the problem is that Technical English Syllabus is totally grammar-oriented and skill-oriented. And teachers keep their focus on the performance of their students in the final examinations point.

2. Self-financing Engineering college classes receive mixed-ability groups of students. So, the teachers are exposed to a scenario where they have to handle the above average (intelligent), average and the below average groups of students in the same classroom and also within the same hour. The gap between these groups is wide indeed. How do we bridge the gap?
3. The mindset of the students in the affiliated engineering colleges is totally syllabus-oriented or examination-oriented. They have many technical subjects to study and master. English happens to be one among the many. Because the English course is titled Technical English, students expect the syllabus to cover technical material. If teachers try to convert English classes into skill set development classes, then the English teachers will be charged that they do not follow the syllabus. Students will complain about the non-completion of the syllabus. Students are customers expecting to pass the examination in the subjects they study. So, students are also examination-oriented.
4. Though English plays a major role in technical education, choice of career, and ultimate success in the chosen fields, English is placed and seen only in the supporting position, support for the major subjects. English teachers are treated only as staff that supports major technical departments. So, English is given least preference in all affiliated Engineering Colleges. There also seems to be an assumption in the minds of administrators that students can themselves study and pass the English examination.
5. Syllabus is framed keeping in mind the four major skills LSRW. Writing skills are examined to some extent. What about the other skills (LSR)? If syllabus framing committee feels that Listening, Speaking and Reading need not be examined, why such inclusion of other skills in the syllabus? What is the end result of it? Neither teachers nor students are serious about teaching or learning LSR.

Solutions Suggested

This paper suggests a few solutions for the problems highlighted above. They are as follows:

1. Literature is the reflection of life through which one can learn much about life. Both Language and Life skills are important for the students. Literature comprises of both. A teacher using a piece of literature can teach language skills as well as

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life skills. Class becomes lively with communicative teaching method where interaction plays a major role and where literature can also play an important part.

2. To handle mixed-ability groups, students immediately after admission can be asked to write a test in English to test their proficiency in the English Language. Based on the results, the students are put into Stream A, Stream B, and Stream C. Stream A: above 60%, Stream B: above 40% and Stream C: below 40%. Syllabuses can be framed accordingly. This helps the teachers also to be clear about the level of the students whom they deal with.
3. Till the higher secondary level, the students consider English to be a subject and both teachers and students automatically assume the same view even in the higher education level. The university should make it clear through the syllabus, examination scheme and the evaluation that English is a tool for communication and no more a subject. Then theory teaching will be very less and more practice sessions can be introduced.
4. If the examination pattern and evaluation method are changed, better performance will result. We may allot 40% for the written exam, 20% for listening and responding, 20% for reading and expounding and 20% for Speaking. This would help students focus on English and communication skills in a balanced manner.

Our goal is to enable students of engineering and technology to master in English in such a way that they are able to develop better study skills even in mastering technical subjects and then use English effectively in all spheres.

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