

Integration of Skills in English Language Teaching for Engineering Students

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Abstract

The increasing specialisation of content in English teaching curricula saw its beginning in the early 1960s. Teaching of English generally is treated as teaching with utilitarian purpose. The concept of ESP (English for specific purpose) is said to be particularly appropriate for teaching English to students of Science and Technology. This paper focuses on teaching English language for Engineering students to develop communicative competence for career development.

The paper argues that language learning is a skill – oriented activity and needs an entirely different pedagogic approach from the one used for other convention courses. The students in technical institutions need to be trained in the skills that help them build a career in corporate world.

The paper discusses the methods, means and techniques of integrating skills in an ELT classroom. Integrating skills through activities helps to train the students in acquiring effective communicative competence in English.

Introduction

English language usage taught at the school level is less communicative in nature, but consists more of how the syntactic rules of English operate. Generally adults use English language only when associated with an occupational, vocational, academic or professional requirement. When needs are clear, learning aim can be defined in terms of these specific purposes under which the language content are tailored. This results in focused teaching such that the learner picks up communicative ability in the required area. The results can be impressive where such a requirement for communicative ability is matched with specially designed materials relevant to the needs of particular students. The concept of ESP is said to be appropriate for teaching English to students of Science and Technology.

A career is (www.selfgrowth.com): “A chosen pursuit, a profession or occupation”. So, when we think of a “career” we have to think long term. A job is: “A regular activity in exchange for payment” (www.selfgrowth.com). If the students are made to know the difference between a job and a career, they will prosper wherever they go.

In an engineering course English is taught for the development of communication skills. The

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13:3 March 2013

Veena Vinod, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Integration of Skills in English Language Teaching for Engineering Students

391

corporate world uses the language of business. The structure that Business English students have to learn is in principle the same as General English students. The difference is in context and vocabulary. Business English has to be taught by setting contexts so that the students are practicing language in settings they may find themselves in. The Internet is a great source of authentic materials which are ideal for use in Business English classes. The teacher can choose company websites that are related to students' work, which can therefore provide the vocabulary practice the students need. Besides, teaching English for communication skills is practical in orientation.

As language learning is a skill oriented activity, it needs an entirely different pedagogic approach from the one used in other convention courses. When students learn English it is important that it is done in an environment that is fun, practical and engaging. The English teachers of engineering colleges will have to act as facilitators in shaping communication skills and personality traits of the students. Their teaching methodology undergoes a transformation because they tend to use interactive, task based and communicative methods more than the usual lecture methods. The teacher should plan for a syllabus that lists learning items in terms of structures, notions, and vocabularies which are then set in situations and which usually integrate a variety of skills.

Objectives

1. To analyse organizational skills needs and identifying specific training requirements.
2. To focus on the specific knowledge, skills and abilities required for career growth.
3. To list the activities that convinces students of the relevance of training.
4. To obtain and allocate resources effectively to accomplish training needs.

Integration of Skills

The English teachers of engineering colleges have a very crucial role to play. Besides training the students to acquire English language skills, they will have to act as facilitators in shaping the personality traits. Soft-skill is a term which refers to personality traits. If the students do not possess the necessary soft skills along with their academic qualifications, they will never be able to grow in their career. Students have many questions like how to make presentations, what tips can avoid pitfalls, how to attend an interview, so on and so forth. So the students need guidance on these aspects to develop among themselves the soft skills along with the language skills. Skills required to get placed in a company are, language skills (LSRW skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills), effective negotiation skills, effective presentation skills, teamwork skills, interview skills, nonverbal communication skills, etc. Students can be helped to acquire these skills by the integration of skills in an English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom through activities.(www.elenahubpages.com)

Activities Suggested

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1. Allow the students to research a particular topic. Using the Internet, they can prepare either individually, in pairs, or in small groups for a presentation, or a piece of writing. The presentation skills are developed along with writing skills. Nonverbal communication skills can also be corrected when the students are presenting on their topics. Presentation skills are extremely useful as the ability to write concise reports is developed.

2. One of the most important writing skills the students need is writing effective business e-mails. The correct tone, structures, and layout are all components students need to learn. Engineers working in corporate sector negotiate through e-mails. So the students will have to develop among themselves effective negotiation skills.

Set a writing task and let students e-mail you. You can reply with your comments. This is more realistic than students simply writing or typing out an e-mail.

3. Speaking and listening skills are integrated in the activity of storytelling. Story telling does not need any special infrastructure apart from an imaginative mind. Ask the students to build their own imaginary story. Each student will say few sentences and the next one will continue and add some more sentences according to his imagination. The teacher will be there encouraging each student to continue the story giving some twists to it. The students will have to listen carefully in order to continue with the story when their turn comes.

4. Reading and listening skills can be integrated by designing an activity in a manner to provide the learner's thoughts on the subject and thereby making them look forward to what the listener's views are. Make one student in a group read aloud an article. The other students will be made to answer questions on the article after they listen to it. The students improve their listening comprehension.

5. Speaking skills and reading skills get integrated in the activity of Pick and Speak. Put the topics on chits of paper. Each student has to pick and speak on the topic for a minute or two. If the topics are pertaining to current issues the students will automatically adopt reading skills.

6. A Group Discussion (GD) is a method used by a company to evaluate certain skills/personality traits in a candidate. In this methodology, the group of candidates is given a topic. Given a few minutes to think about the topic they are asked to discuss it among themselves for 15 to 20 minutes.

The aspects which make up a GD are verbal communication, nonverbal behaviour, conformation to norms, decision making ability and co-operation. The teachers should conduct mock GDs based on various topics and give detailed feedback to students.

7. Make students to prepare an imagined interview with personality of their choice to help them acquire interview skills. The teacher should conduct mock interviews based on various situations which make the students develop self-confidence to face an interview.(www.owl.englishpurdue.edu)

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Integration of Skills in English Language Teaching for Engineering Students

393

The list is not exhaustive. The teacher can plan more activities of the type based on his/her experience in the ELT classroom to train the students in different skills with the help of technologies developed. The main objective should be to train students for the purpose of practical ability.

Conclusion

The English language teachers teaching in engineering colleges should develop new and exciting means of integrating language in all aspects with innovative technologies. They should encourage the students to allow for mistakes, open themselves to possibilities, and trust their intuition. Students need to expertise their English language and communication skills irrespective of their educational standards, especially communication skills which are interwoven. The integrated skill approach exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Moreover, this approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest or merely a key to passing an examination. Instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. Having the right communication skills will surely equip the students with a liberating confidence and ability to express themselves and helps them to widen their career prospects. It is one way of enhancing their potential for earning by making them stand out for career growth and advancement.

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All the above items must be cited within the body of the paper.

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