



## **TEACHING ENGLISH IN INDIAN ENGINEERING INSTITUTIONS: CHALLENGES AND REMEDIES- DEVELOPING A 'BRIDGE-COURSE'**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*English language teaching in engineering colleges in itself demands sympathetic attitude of the management of the institution, sincere and attentive motivation of the students and of course the creative and motivating guidance of English teachers. Since the employability of the engineering graduates depends by and large upon the English language skills that need to be honed in them maintaining the standard compatible to global understanding. Of late it has occurred in the mind of the curriculum designers that mere technological knowledge imparted to the graduates is not sufficient enough to ensure their competence in the job market. So on much demand separate departments of humanities are carved out in technical institutions. English teachers are recruited by these institutions to take care of the future of the would-be technocrats in India. Mostly the subject gets its fantastic title like Technical Communication, Personality Development, Soft Skills etc. and very rarely English Language. This shows a very pathetic condition because English language teaching in engineering colleges is not being taken on priority basis. The medium of instruction to supply technological knowledge is English and due mainly to the second rate treatment given to it by the teachers other than English teachers has corrupted the English language up to the extent that the students' interest is flagged and they do not take this subject proper in their serious thinking domain. This article may prove to be very inspiring to those who have taken English*

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*teaching and learning in engineering colleges as a challenge and whose endeavor is to bring innovations in the methodology of teaching English language in India. English grammar teaching can be made interesting once it is introduced in the classroom by framing a context that suits the language learning aptitude of the students.*

**Keywords:** *English Language Teaching, Language Skills, Engineering Colleges, Bridge course*

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION: Teaching English to Engineering Students- The Challenges**

English is an international language widely used for business, communication and information exchange. It also serves as a medium of education. However, many people struggle with their language proficiency - particularly engineering students. Engineering students from regional medium schools must learn English during their four year graduation program, and possessing strong language and vocabulary abilities is essential for both academic success and professional advancement. Without effective communication in English, engineering students could struggle academically or professionally. In certain cases some students have found it difficult to get placements in colleges. Studies and surveys have demonstrated that students struggle with listening and reading comprehension. They frequently fail to use the correct word at the right time and demonstrate hesitation when speaking or writing. Many students from regional medium backgrounds struggle with this issue, as they are taught grammar rules in school but practice listening and speaking very little. The engineering colleges in India are bound to adopt English language as a medium of instruction and for that reason the whole curricula revolve round the effective operation of the language inside the classroom and laboratories. The intakes in these institution are from the diverse and pluralistic linguistic community across the country be it the matter of the students or the faculty member of various disciplines of engineering courses. The intensive native 'language pull' poses so many debacles in the operation of English as a medium and so the tendency of both the teacher and the taught is to skip the situation or context that need be evolved at any cost. The direct method of English language teaching seldom gets fruition because language remains a barrier to communication process. In such a situation what measures should be followed so that the transfer of technological knowledge may not get hampered is a million dollar question. The methods of English language teaching meet a bold line of demarcation in between the direct and indirect methods. This is the general concept that since English is not the native language of Indian community the direct or caught method will be quite ineffective. The indirect or taught method will prove as blessings to elevate the condition of the classroom teaching up to the level so that the communication process may run smoothly. The grammar translation method of teaching English is being mistaken as outdated and sloth. English teachers working in Engineering colleges with the undergraduate engineering students have reported that if the students are taught English imparting little or

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no sense of ideas they panic; and in the worst case and to call it little bit better at the cost of their interest for learning.

### **1.1 Lack of training in Grammar**

English grammar can be a challenging subject for students. They may not prioritize it as much as other topics, feel embarrassed if their writing contains mistakes, or lack basic knowledge on using proper grammar and mechanics correctly. Whatever the case may be, students often struggle with this area of their education. Merely teaching grammar rules at the school level does not cut much ice unless the students practice the structures in day to day life and use it for their academic purposes.

### **1.2 Lack of vocabulary and the misunderstood word**

Poor vocabulary is one of the greatest challenges in English comprehension. When student from a regional media background studies technical subjects in the English language, his lack of vocabulary makes it difficult for him to comprehend the meaning of the text. It has been seen that in the regional medium backgrounds, students study, physics, chemistry, mathematics et cetera in regional languages and or not aware of the technical words, when the teacher teaches the technical subjects in the English language, lack of vocabulary or understanding of the technical words makes it impossible for the student to grasp the meaning. There is also the challenge of availability of books in the regional languages. Most of the books of the technical subjects in engineering or written in English, which the student finds difficult to understand because of the lack of training in vocabulary in this regard L Ron Hubbard has emphasized the importance of the misunderstood word he writes:

*...all becomes distinctly blank beyond a word not understood or wrongly understood. It can make you feel blank or washed out. It can make you feel "not there" and a sort of a nervous upset feeling can follow after that. The matter is far more critical than one might surmise and of the three barriers it is the misunderstood that bears most upon human relations, the mind and understanding. It is the misunderstood word that establishes aptitude—or lack of it. It produces a vast panorama of reactions and is the prime factor involved with stupidity. It also determines whether or not one can actually perform a learned skill, and to what degree of proficiency. All of these are the result of one or more words or symbols not understood or wrongly understood. The misunderstood word can stop a student in his tracks completely. Knowing how to determine when there is a misunderstood word or symbol, how to find it and how to handle it are critical to the success of any student.*

### **1.3 Mother Tongue Interference**



Language is a tool used for conveying thoughts, feelings and needs. It is an essential skill that must be acquired in order to communicate effectively. One of the primary challenges faced by language learners when mastering a second language is mother tongue interference. “Mother-tongue interference refers to the influence of the native language of the learner on her/his acquisition of the target language. What we mean by the target language is the language the learner is aiming to learn (L2). (“Contrastive analysis,” 2015).” (Thyab) This phenomenon occurs when one’s first language influences them when speaking and writing the new language. Interference typically arises at the phonological, grammatical and semantic levels and can have either a beneficial or detrimental impact on an individual's capacity for speaking the language fluently. The positive aspect of this interference is that it assists students in learning the sound patterns of the target language. Unfortunately, it also prevents them from mastering how to employ these new linguistic elements when crafting messages. It is essential to recognize mother tongue interference and take measures to erase it from a learner's mind. Furthermore, practicing the second language regularly is necessary in order to improve fluency and confidence levels.

#### **1.4 Poor Listening Skills**

In India, students pursuing engineering education often struggle with their listening skills during classroom lectures. This leads to anxiety about their English comprehension and may negatively impact their performance in the classroom. These issues arise largely because students’ English learning is heavily influenced by their mother tongue and only assessed from an exam perspective. Unfortunately, this leaves students with less focused efforts on mastering the language than what would be ideal. Something foreign or unfamiliar bombarded on the receptive mind is destined to be the part of oblivion. Learning is ever a fun if it carries some sense and meaning

#### **1.5 Marginalization of the English Teacher**

The basic problem faced by the teachers of English in technical institutions in India is that they get second rate treatment by the management and the blind rule of majority in power is being followed. The English teachers are either marginalized or de-motivated by the peers. Teacher of English whether in the mushrooming private engineering colleges or even the IITs, NITs, IIITs and so many other technical institutions of national reputation have been the experience holders of such painful situations. The government of India has formulated the policy of appointing the directors in these institutions who have the background of technical studies only. Those who have devoted themselves wholly in the field of education and management can prove more effective in guidance, counselling, decision making and innovating things. The corporate world demands such technocrats who have the better understanding of complex behavior of people at work. For this they need to have the better



communicative ability so that they may easily be adapted to the volatile and fast changing culture of the globe.

## 2.0 The Remedies

### 2.1 Empowering the English Teacher

English language does not have any alternative and particularly for engineering graduates it is the only language that opens the gate of job opportunities in the market. It is against this background that we would like to come up with a humble plea to all those concerned that English teachers in the engineering colleges must get first class treatment so that they may be able to maintain their morale. The management of the institutions must come forward to take steps to receive the *bona-fide* membership of English faculty and motivate all the teachers and students to develop English as a campus language. Some Faculty Development Programs should be initiated to improve the use of correct English as a medium of instruction followed by teachers particularly those teachers who have remained alien to English language and literature as the main course domain. The language load of English can be increased in the campus only by shifting the load of the native languages in operation. There is no need mentioning this fact that learning is an everlasting process and for that matter the teachers who are not good at English should discard the ego if any in them and come forward in accepting the weaknesses. It is true that the teachers of the other departments have their specialization in their respective fields of studies but if they follow up the very poor system of communication through language in the classroom they surely doom the future of so many at a time. What I intend to say that the English teachers in the engineering colleges have the potential in them to donate their hard earnings to the various departments and fact should gladly be accepted. The basic rules of English grammar are challenged by the management authorities when the formal correspondence letters exhibit hundreds of errors. When English teachers give feedback on errors, the management must accept those mistakes gracefully and not harass the teachers because a timid English teacher cannot build confidence in students. The rules of English grammar may be given some concession occasionally but it does not mean people have the right to invent individual languages to create anarchy. Some slip of tongue or slip of pen can be overlooked but due attention and respect should be given to the rules of grammar and pronunciation by authorities to set up good role models that the students can look up to.

### 2.1 Preparing a 'Register'

English language has the innate system of grammar that need be brought in the conscious part of the learners. The traditional method of introducing the rules of English grammar has already been proved least effective because they do not catch hold the interest of the learners. The analysis of the classroom situation is the first requisite of teaching and learning process.

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Any sort of distortion will cause mere fatigue and boredom. Suppose the lesson of nominalization in the system of English grammar is to be taught. The teachers can give the situation which may help the students pick up the examples from their own experience. The teachers from various departments like Mechanical, Civil, Electronics and Electrical etc. may be sought corporation in providing the list of the various engineering tools and the students may be asked to frame sentences which may describe the uses of those tools in understanding technological phenomena. At the same time the students may be told to describe the process of operations of those tools. This way the language being taught comes in direct contact with the present context/situation.

The various verb forms used by the students may bring to their consciousness the innate and hidden sense of grammar they are using through the language. It is through the expression of the students that the teachers should stimulate the prepositional and conjunctive aspects of the parts of speech. The place and manner relations indicated by various prepositions make better understanding and the interest of the learners never flag. While describing the process the students are bound to break the rules of time and tense sequence. The English teachers are advised to correct the students by acquainting them with the conventionality followed by the language. The process writing exercise should be repeated time and again so that the 'would-be technocrats' may not feel themselves delinked with the actual situation they are living in engineering colleges. The construction of well-structured and meaningful sentences should be taught so that even those students who come from Hindi or other regional medium school may be brought up to the take off stage. They should be motivated to catch-up the simple rules of grammar through various linguistic activities.

## **2.1 Redesigning the teaching material**

The teaching material designed in most of the engineering institutions demand fresh look. More and more alternative choices should be made available to the students so that they may pursue the courses quite befitting to their individual interest. The English grammar exercises must be kept in view while prescribing the material. The presentation of such exercises should be made so as to motivate them reading and re-reading the text material. While doing the exercises on grammar the students should require to have the application of logic and reasoning. Grammatical items which get over burdened with too much descriptions prove very hazardous to the learners' zeal and interest. The innate sense of grammar in the students need be stimulated by the help of parsing, analysis and synthesis of sentences. To help the creativity in the learners some familiar issues from the literary texts may be provided and the students should be told to frame sentences describing the situation they apprehend. English grammar teaching earns much complexity in the case when the learners mind get jumbled with so many grammatical terminologies. To avoid this medley the exercises pertaining to the grammatical senses must be made lucid and comprehensive. The difficulty level of such exercises must match the problem solving aptitude and mental make-up of the undergraduate



students of the engineering colleges. The exercises on editing, gap filling and apt word selection in running paragraphs can better help the development of comprehensive ability of the language learner. This holistic approach in designing the course material demands the complete intellectual and academic involvement of the material designer. The technical terminologies, the jargons and the registers which get frequent and repeated occurrence in the engineering texts should be selected on priority basis in designing vocabulary exercises. The use of teaching materials in digital form can help the language laboratory invite a platform where students may get through various grammatical exercises.

## **2.2 Using Multimedia tools**

Nowadays, our English teachers have the advantage of using power point presentation that may prove much beneficial if the grammatical structures of the sentences are worked on technically. All the exercises on phonetics, phonemes, morphemes, syntactic etc. can very conveniently be taught in the classroom without leaving any scope for lethargy. Making the students watch short videos on contemporary topics and then holding discussions on the videos will stimulate the interest of the students in the speaking-listening exercises. The findings of the discussions can be given as an assignment to the students in class or as homework. The assignments should be marked since marks are a great motivating factor for students. The teachers of other disciplines can be collaborated with in designing smaller problems that the students can solve by discussing in the English classroom. This will not only help the students practice their spoken and written English, but at the same time enrich the understanding of the subject. The English teachers could ask the other subject teachers to record the problem and the video of that problem would be played over multimedia by the English teacher as the exercise.

## **2.3 Learning English throughout the course**

The course module for the students of engineering colleges should be framed semester wise so that they may be in constant touch with the grammar exercises. So far as my observation goes most of the engineering colleges in India adopt so brief a course module to be finished in a semester or two and then after the students are left to enjoy a complete holiday without carrying the slightest burden of the systematic study of English language. In fact this reflects a very pathetic and hopeless situation. It is at the end point of their academic career they are expected to face interviews, group discussion, language and grammar test, presentation skill test and what not. The matter is quite understandable here. One cannot teach an old dog new tricks; similarly the students can have the technical knowledge in a single go but as far as language acquisition is concerned it takes a persistent and long practice. Since language is more of a skill and an art than a science, practicing and using it in the guidance of grammar rules has no other option. Hence it is advisable that the course module of English language being followed in these technical institution needs serious attention. In every semester they



should be provided with brief and systematic courses in English grammar exercises so that they may be quite able to maintain the standard and purity of English language. The role play exercises should be entertained in the language laboratories to help them build confidence and team spirit. Some of the engineering colleges have initiated personality development programme so that the students may be ready enough to be employed. Language in general and English language in particular is observed to be the first parameter to judge the efficiency and capability of the candidate. The students have to face this first hurdle all with decency. The substandard English having no touch of the sense of grammar is enough to dim the glaze of the in-depth technical knowledge that the students have earned working rigorously for years. Listening, reading, speaking and writing English can be empowered and consolidated only with the help of teaching English grammar. The personality of the engineering graduates need to be groomed and shaped as to suit the global expectation.

#### **2.4 Making Small Changes**

The cultural environment of the campus should be motivated to carry maximum English language load. English teacher of the engineering colleges has to shoulder the greater responsibility. He/she can be instrumental in facilitating descent English language conversation and interactions. The implementation of the basic rules of grammar should be generated by organizing workshop, symposia and other activities so that linguistic competence of the participants may be improved. The sentence and clause analysis exercises will certainly help the students have the grip over the structure. Some assignment on thematic appreciation can improve the creative writing and creative speaking ability of the students. To cultivate a regular newspaper reading habit among them an innovative approach of making the clippings of the news items and then further rewriting the same by the students may prove much beneficial. The evaluation of the write-up submitted by the students must be done to make them aware of grammatical errors they commit in the course of writing. In the language laboratory simple and familiar words should be hurled up and the students may be told to frame simple and grammatically correct sentences extempore. While doing such exercises the English teacher must plain the limited situations in which the students are framing their sentences. The current issues of social, economic, political and technological domain should be selected for classroom discussions. Every week a test of English language should be conducted so that the consistency in doing exercises on English grammar may remain unhindered. The list of such words which are asked in various competitive examinations in India and abroad should be prepared with their appropriate and authentic descriptions by the teachers and every week twenty words may be handed over to the students for keen observation. Such formats as Match word test, antonyms, synonyms, homonyms, homophones, cloze- test etcetera should be prepared based on the list given to the students. To help the reasoning ability the jumble word test may be entertained.

#### **2.5 Doing away with unnecessary academic red-tapism**

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The psychological make-up of the undergraduate students is bound to be different than the school going children. This period exhibits uncertainty and much impatience in the learners due mainly to some biological and hormonal imbalance. The teachers in general and English teacher in particular must develop understanding that while teaching such students. The emotional drive in the learners may not accept such things for learning that may not bless them with quick results. Teaching English grammar with all its intricacies, meddled up and jumbled rules may play havoc with the enthusiasm of the learners falling in this particular age group. We have in the market such books on English grammar which are getting frequent references from so many English teachers who have not left even a single stone unturned to prove themselves as big guns of the subject. A fake impression is created by such teachers only to prove that the subject is too difficult to be handled by the easy-going minds of the learners. The truth speaks that such teachers have no intention of sharing the minds of the learners in the classroom. The good teachers of English (creative English grammar teachers) never try to promote such grammar books which are sold like commodities at market place. His creativity gets fruition when he creates grammar from language exercises which are self-created and self-developed by him. The dead and decayed rules without their application in language exercises can only be hazardous and unproductive for the students of these institutions. A good teacher has to be a good learner. The teacher finds the students in the classroom situation as letters of the alphabet sitting in different combinations. The strength and weakness of each and every students must be acknowledged by the teacher. English grammar teaching is not the exception to this rule. That grammar teaching proves much the more effective which derives rules from the simple expressions of the smile, laughter, anger, love, pity and sympathy like feelings which are counted on the gestures of the students. The undergraduate engineering students look for such English grammar teachers who have potential in them to understand their feelings and emotions. We can understand it that at this particular stage of learning the students are very conscious about their future. They want such things be dropped into the province of their knowledge which may help them catch hold the opportunities in the job market. They are ready to ride on the steps that lead them to their destination. They are in a hurry and desire things happen in a single go.

## **2.6 Bringing Creativity in the classroom**

The English teacher has the creative task beckoning him to convert the desire of the engineering graduates into what he thinks is desirable. It is difficult to choose the best method from so many methods available. The presentation of grammatical exercises in the classroom situation demands much creativity. Grammar teaching has to be functional and not deterrent and restrictive to the natural flow of English language seeking operation. It is the demand of the time when tech-savvy graduates may sell themselves in the global job market at high rate with decent and effective English language aptitude. The conventionality as well as the modernity of English language can have the better way of understanding if the engineering graduates are toned up to suit the job market condition across the globe. Hence it is the need

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of the hour when language teacher takes the responsibility of English grammar teaching as the greatest challenge overhead.

## **2.6 Resolving Mother Tongue Interference**

To address this issue, instructors need to address students' requirements for scaffolding strategies when teaching academic listening. This study investigates the needs of undergraduate engineering students regarding scaffolding strategies in language classrooms and compares them with their performance on an academic listening test. Language has to be the servant of situation and not the master of it and for that matter how can English language be the exception to this rule. English language must encapsulate the vibrant minds and thoughts of the learners and this can be better ensured if they at least respond to the grammatical system that is operated in the language. Any knowledge be it the general or technological can contribute an ounce to the overall cerebral growth of an individual only when it gets related to the life that it bears.

## **3.0 CONCLUSION- Preparing a Bridge Course by identifying the register**

Research has identified specific words that can be used in various contexts, such as Medical English (Wang, Liang & Ge, 2008), Engineering English (Graham & Osment, 2013; Ward, 2009) and Plumbing English (Coxhead & Demecheleer, 2018). These word lists provide teachers and students with an easy-to-access resource for recognizing language use specific terms specific to a certain field of language proficiency. Grammar can be learned better through reading and writing regularly. This will expose them to new words, give them practice correcting their own errors, and give them the chance to work with another student on language skills. Teachers should strive to involve their students in conversations about grammar. This could be done through discussions or peer review; students can gain invaluable experience from working with someone else and it serves as an effective way to keep them motivated and interested in their studies.

The greatest challenge that the student from the vernacular background, faces in the engineering colleges is that of unfamiliarity of language and content. One is able to solve mathematical equations with much ease, but reading and understanding technical concepts in the English language using difficult in technical terms which the student is unfamiliar with causes in him or her, a loss of motivation and a feeling of inferiority. This can be overcome with the introduction of what we propose and choose to term a bridge course. The bridge course need not be given to everyone in the institution. After the admission, a group of experts can identify the training needs of all the students who have taken admission. After proper assessment and gradation, the students need to be assigned groups and timings for remedial classes. In these classes, the students would be introduced to the technical register of all the subjects they need to study initially. They could be introduced to the technical terms

that is that is the register and the structure of the sentences that are most commonly used in the books. Along with this, the students could be made to practice simple conversational exercises that can help them ask questions to the teacher in the regular classes. Regular assessment of the students and improvement of the study material can be carried out until we are prepared with a proper 'bridge course' with different training needs of students, said different abilities and different backgrounds. In this way, the challenge of language being a hurdle can be overcome and language would prove to be an important tool in empowerment of the students and provide much-needed confidence to the anxious and apprehensive teenagers that set their foot with a lot of hope and expectations in the technical institutions of higher learning.

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