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## TEACHING ENGLISH - A CHALLENGING JOB

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### Abstract

In the present competitive world, competence in English is linked with career options. Management wants student's competence to be translated into better placement records. The whole teaching learning process is carried out in English language. There are students from the vernacular medium who have studied English as a subject for a few short years. Most of the activities in the class are done in the vernacular or the mother tongue. The focus of the teaching learning process is to secure good grades/scores in the final examination. The teacher is the facilitator of examinations rather than of learning. The students memorize, translate and retranslate and, finally reproduce the crammed information or knowledge in the final examinations. No creativity is witnessed on the part of the students from these vernacular medium schools. This paper aims to explore different techniques in teaching which makes it more enjoyable by experimentation and also discusses certain aspects of these challenges and their possible alternative solutions.

**Keywords:** Communication skills, Imaginative skills, Interpersonal Skills, Vernacular Medium, CCCAP

### Introduction

Teaching English is a passionate job. But the present day English Teacher is under a lot of pressure to acquire diverse range of skills. The focus has been shifted from teacher- centered to learner-centered. Teaching Technical English in engineering colleges has become more and more challenging. Typically, the teachers of English in engineering colleges have to meet the requirements of this heterogeneity. One has to simulate different types of techniques, imaginatively using the language laboratory and introducing group activities which promote fluency, impart confidence to the learner in effectively using English so as to communicate to an audience in interpersonal situations. This will help the students aspire their dreams, and a sense of satisfaction to the English teacher. In the present competitive world, competence in English is

linked with career options. Management wants student's competence to be translated into better placement records. The English teacher undergoes a lot of pressure in molding the student to be industry ready. Knowledge and technology no longer know borders. They have become transnational. In consequence, the industry is now developing something that it has not done before: a fully operational, international supply chain. It is moving offshore from International cities to Indian metropolis. Thus, it has created opportunities for smart graduates with excellent communication skills. NASSCOM says that at present there is severe shortage of qualified young men and women who have excellent communication skills in English with the quality of leadership. It supports the fact with statistical data that only 28 % of graduates are employable. Even though the students are good in their basic technical skills, they are poor in communication.

### **Objectives**

The present paper examines the difficulties faced by the students in learning English language. The students from different background face different difficulties like spelling, vocabulary usage, pronunciation etc. The focus is on role of English Teacher in making these students learn English with more emphasis on students from vernacular medium. The different approaches to be followed in teaching the students are discussed in the paper.

### **Review of Literature**

Carver & Dickinson (1982), in their journal paper, discussed the complexity of learning process, and said that the learning process takes place only if the learner takes responsibility to learn autonomously outside the class room and comes to the class room well prepared. Efficient learners continuously monitor and analyze their performance. This was presented by Naiman, et al (1978) in their research paper. These learners also try to develop efficient learning strategies. Mc Grath (2002) has supported the idea of introducing the culture of foreign language (English) in the textbooks. Bada and Okan (2000) Tye &Tye (1984) emphasized that more systematic and organizational approach is needed in teaching and learning English grammar. Experts like Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1988) have stressed that individual teacher should initiate reforms in professional development. Doering, A., et al, [(2003), felt that many experienced teachers are not well prepared to use new technological tools as teaching aids and are not using resources properly. Ngwaru and Opoku-Awankwa (2010) in their research found that the students from

weak socio-economic background find a lot of difficulty in learning English. Glasson (2009) has noted that self esteem and confidence level of learner decreases with verbal criticism. It makes them feel negative towards learning English. To meet present challenges in the competitive world, K.R. Lakshminarayan, T. Murugavel (2010) and P. Prasad (2009) have stressed on learning different communication skills and soft skills along with learning of English.

### Tools Used

The following tools are used in present study:

- Questionnaire given to English teachers
- Learners Notebooks
- Test/Examination scripts of learners.
- Essays and Compositions to test the comprehension capabilities of learners and their ability to assimilate and reproduce

### The Role of English Teacher

The Role of English Teacher is very crucial and responsible to meet the needs of the students. The English teacher has to address to the students to face real life situations, rather than making the teaching syllabi oriented. The curriculum prescribed by the universities serves as guidelines in teaching to students. The English teachers should use their imaginative skills along with the syllabi. For instance, conducting mock interviews according to curriculum helps the student to meet the basic requirements, but mentoring them in consolidating their strengths, minimizing their limitations, preparing the resume which is not tailor made, addressing their problems before/during /after their interviews makes them more confident in facing the interview. The management, instead of concentrating only on soft skills, should work for having English practice sessions in all the years of engineering. Poetry should be given due importance, along with Technical English to make the student enjoy the flavor of English literature.

It is to understand that learning is a life-long process. Developing communication skills is a challenging job. The communication skills are collaborative processes which lead to the growth of our personality, character, knowledge and wisdom. The students often face problems like difference in knowledge levels, lack of good command over English language, attitude of

procrastination, self-centeredness and tendency to stereo-type a person or a situation. Some more time should be allocated particularly to address these problems with one to one interaction. The student must learn communicative English rather than adhering to grammatical English. He should be able to produce an appropriate, natural and socially acceptable utterance in all contexts of communication. For example 'Hey, dude, you fix my car!' is grammatically correct but is not acceptable in most social contexts. 'Excuse me, sir, can I expect my car to be ready today' is more appropriate.

English is taught as a compulsory subject and the whole teaching learning process is carried out in English language. This enables the students of these schools to learn English in an environment where most of the interaction between the teacher and the students is in English. As a result, the students of these elite schools are more proficient in English and perform well in the final examinations. There are students from the vernacular medium who have studied English as a subject for a few short years. Most of the activities in the class are done in the vernacular or the mother tongue. English language is explained through the vernaculars. The focus of the teaching learning process is to secure good grades/scores in the final examination. The students resort to memorization and cramming. The teacher is the facilitator of examinations rather than of learning. The students memorize, translate and retranslate and, finally reproduce the crammed information or knowledge in the final examinations. No creativity is witnessed on the part of the students from these vernacular medium schools.

### **Discussion and Suggestions**

The following approaches can be introduced to make the students from vernacular medium schools to overcome their problems in speaking English. Initially Total physical response approach should be used. In this approach instructions will be given by the teacher to the students, so as to involve them in physical activity, wherein they try to concentrate on the instructions. For example instructions like, close the door, sit in the front bench etc should be used; further these instructions should be extended to three to four sentences like, 'take the text book, open a particular page and concentrate on the lecture'. These situations make them more familiar with the language.

Group activities should not be limited to holding Group Discussions or Debates, but they should be extended to role plays, games, skits, Chinese whispers etc. The students should be made to converse only in English. If any student fails to speak in English, as a punishment, they should be made to recite a poem or read a paragraph from their text. They should be given more sessions on oratory skills. Special workshops should be conducted so as to pay individual attention. If any student makes a mistake in the class, he should not be punished in the class, but counseled individually after the class. This is a healthy approach, as it does not weaken them psychologically.

The next challenge will be with the students who are more comfortable with English. These students are to be given more sessions on grammar, reading, intonation and stress patterns. Phonetics should be dealt, not as a subject of research, but as an application in conversation. The phonetic sounds are to be taught only to the limitation of understanding the correct pronunciation of the word. They should be given rigorous training in the laboratory, often leaving them to explore the contents by themselves.

Students become overly dependent on teacher. Many times students automatically look to the teacher for correct answers, instead of trying themselves. They should be given positive encouragement, so as to make them more comfortable. This increases the willingness to answer, even though the answer is wrong.

Many a times students converse among themselves in their native language, even in English class. Strict class rules should be laid, and students must follow them, stressing the fact that English class will be only in English.

Some students will be stubborn and distracting others. If the majority of the class is behaving in this manner, it might be the fault of teacher or the teaching is boring. The teacher has to mend the ways of teaching. If any student behaves in that way, the teacher must reprimand the student immediately, not necessarily in the classroom. If the problem persists it must be brought to the notice of management immediately.

Sometimes the intended topic gets diverted in the class. This is a very good sign as long as the students converse in English. It indicates that the students are more participative and are good

receptors. But, if the topic strays far, it is important to divert the attention of the students to the intended discussion.

Students tend to become inattentive in the class. In engineering colleges, students often get bored of listening to technical aspects in English. So, the teacher should plan the lesson properly and interestingly in order to get students' attention. The teacher should include certain themes, facts so as to make students relate the theme with the lecture.

The challenge of developing inter personal skills among the students is to practice soft skills like leadership, team building, decision making etc as well as the life skills like creativity, critical thinking, conflict management, assertiveness and positive thinking. (CCCAP).

**Life Skills (C C C A P):**

Creativity	Critical Thinking	Conflict Management
Assertiveness	Positive Thinking	

- **Creativity:** “Ideas are the root of creation”. Creativity is a mental activity, with perception, thinking and imagination going hand in hand. It involves generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between or among existing ideas or concepts. Inculcating the need for creativity in the students more space should be given for creative ideas in lab sessions.
- **Critical Thinking:** ‘Critical’ in ‘critical thinking’ refers to ‘thinking’ that involves arriving at fair, careful judgments, after taking a good look at both positive and negative aspects from all angles. As a part of critical thinking, one should broaden or widen one’s boundaries, accept others into their fold, accept known and unknown, rivals, opponents and even enemies. Critical thinking helps in making one feel responsible, monitor one’s thinking and distinguish between right and wrong. Critical thinking helps students to become conscientious individuals.
- **Conflict Management:** Conflict is a situation where individuals, groups, countries are willingly or unwillingly involved in a serious disagreement or argument because of opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes. The best strategy to be followed in conflict

management is Win-Will situation. “Seek first to understand and then to be understood” says Stephen R. Covey in ‘Seven Habits of highly effective people’.

- **Assertiveness:** If one uses the expressions or acts that will not hurt others, then they are assertive by nature. They are people who are happy and make others happy. It is a specific ability and a skill we need to use in order to express our opinions, our desires strongly and confidently. It’s also a skill that one can employ to indicate that they respect others rights and feelings. Assertive communication is direct, open and honest. To develop the skill one has to be empathetic communicate, be willing to learn, not ashamed to accept ignorance, speak confidently with eye contact and be an attentive and patient listener.
- **Positive Thinking:** ‘A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity, an optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty’ - Winston Churchill. Positive thinking helps students think of their strengths that in turn strengthens their self esteem. As a positive person one believes in one self as an achiever, sees a new situation as an opportunity to learn. Positive thinking helps student to look at a complicated situation as a source of inspiration, take on an impossible looking situation as a challenge. One does not get deterred by failure but remain motivated to continue to shine.

## Conclusion

Thus, the teachers of English in engineering colleges have to meet the requirements of this heterogeneity by evolving a proper strategy, simulating the above discussed techniques, imaginatively using the language laboratory and introducing group activities which promote fluency, impart confidence for the learner. Teaching-Learning process should be made easy and more enjoyable. This will help the students aspire their dreams, and a sense of satisfaction to the English teacher.

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