



Enhancing Interactional Competence in Engineering Classrooms

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Abstract- Teaching language is not an easy task in the 21st century classroom. English is taught extensively in India and the teacher has to be competent enough to deal with students of different origins and interests and capabilities. The Indian syllabus mainly focuses on written communication and very often it is found that learners don't communicate in English. The employment milieu, on the other hand, demands communicative competency which is most often lacking. Effective technology integration is an alternative method to support second-language acquisition and facilitate teacher productivity. In Constructivist teaching, learners are actively involved and it fosters critical thinking and provides a platform for the students to question the material presented. The English teachers in Engineering Colleges are prepared to integrate technology to support the learning needs of students but technology should only be used as an ancillary tool to enhance the learning environment. A teacher may adopt techniques to make the textbook an effective and enjoyable training tool for the learners using various interesting methodologies. This paper explores some of the language activities that are found helpful in developing the learners' ability to communicate freely and spontaneously in English.

Keywords: technology integration, constructivist teaching, language activities, critical thinking.

I. INTRODUCTION:

In modern teaching of language, skills are sharply distinguished from the overall learning of a language. The major challenges for an English language teacher in Engineering Colleges in India are the issue of utilizing the prescribed textbooks. The elaborate procedure of teaching poetry and drama and fiction has all been given up in recent times especially at the higher levels of education.

"The emphasis now falls on the fitness of the learner to use language for the utilitarian, official purposes. The earlier liberal idea of developing the overall personality of the student has been discarded in favour of this new philosophy of readiness for daily, practical use of language"¹.

As a matter of fact, this makes for a very great change in the concept of language teaching. The teachers are constantly in search of effective strategies to motivate and enhance students' learning experience. The importance of communication and its need of the hour are continuously emphasized by the language trainers and English teachers. The technical students do not take English subject seriously. As a result very less number of students is employable and the others lack soft skills and communication skills.

Teaching English – An Art:

Language acquisition is merely based on exposure, interest, observation and stimulus. The task of a teacher is more important, because her responsibility is in handling adult beginners where you have students of multilingualism and mixed ability group and therefore need intrinsic planning to keep classes more interesting, challenging and motivated. Generally, a class is a blend ranging from below average to excellent. It is the responsibility of the trainer to open the doors of knowledge among learners and to inspire and ignite their mind for learning English and to motivate them to be aware of how important it is for them. Now the task here for the teachers is to concentrate more on interaction and to outline activities which involve a lot of student talk.

The students of this century need non – traditional methods of learning. Students need a push to wake them up to the existing competition to search their career prospects. The thrust upon them to be well equipped is on communication skills and interpersonal skills. We are living in an ambience where unhealthy practices, peer pressure, workplace conflicts and the pride among the higher-ups are very prevalent. This would stunt the growth if one lacks in communication and interpersonal skills. Teachers should prepare learner centric and learning centric activities and training must be given to the students to participate in formal instruction based learning processes. In situations where students are reluctant to participate, the teacher very carefully plays an important role to instigate them.

ICT Teaching:

The constructive teaching can be introduced through ICT methods, during which each student can be given an opportunity to participate in the discussions. There are number of ways and styles that can be applied in the constructivist classroom. ICT includes a mixture of text, audio, motionless imagery animatronics, video and interactive content which help students to improve their listening and speaking skills. With the advent of the language laboratories, the use of ICT for the English class has a profound meaning. The teaching – learning process becomes very effective and interesting through activities. Lab activities like Presentations, debates, Film reviews, Group Discussions, mock interviews, videos, recorded speeches of smart people, listening to advertisements are used as effective tools for communication.

Activities should be planned according to the need of the industry and individual requirements. Writing an attractive resume and training them in introducing self are also practically required for the learners during their study period. Teaching English through movies and songs helps the students to learn pronunciation, vocabulary modulation, and delivery of words effectively and enthusiastically. On similar lines, the teachers should adapt themselves and adopt certain new techniques that well suit the mood and level of the learners. Teachers should provide adequate activities and create a mutual learning environment. Language develops faster and meaningfully in social contexts through ICT. Massive Online Courses (MOOCS), NPTEL and the like is another option which provides inputs to teachers based on their needs. There is a paradigm shift from instructive to constructivism in teaching and learning of today. Constructivism demands the effective use of ICT. Student – centred learning is a significant feature of technological usage in education.

Grammar Teaching:

Teaching grammar is always a difficult task for teachers, because learners feel it as a boring and tedious subject. Many language teachers teach grammar as a theory and train students to workout exercises correctly for examination. Learners are not exposed to adequate examples to learn the rules of language from the scratch.

“A century of research shows that traditional grammar lessons—those hours spent diagramming sentences and memorizing parts of speech—don’t help and may even hinder students’ efforts to become better writers. Yes, they need to learn grammar, but the old-fashioned way does not work”². Grammar is essential for flawless communication, and teachers must teach them with different styles like games, Power point presentation, advertisements, by giving live examples and so on. Interactive method of teaching grammar will make the class alive. Grammar and vocabulary can also be taught through advertisements. Choice of language is necessary to get along the communication skills of students. The use of English language in advertisement gives a possibility to utilize English words in their every day conversation.

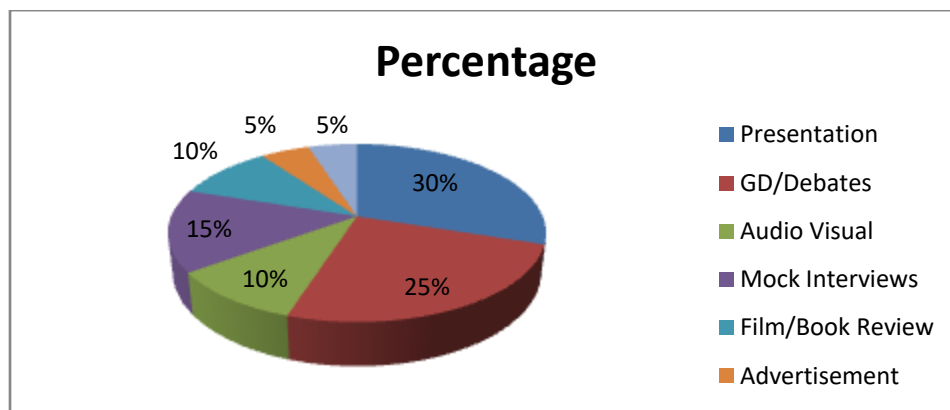
Advertisements

Slogan

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|----|----------|--|
| 1. | Popchips | Less Guilty. More pleasure |
| 2. | KitKat | Have a Break, Have a Kitkat |
| 3. | Lego | The Bane Of Your Foot’s Existence |
| 4. | Tide | “Tide’s In, Dirt’s Out” |
| 5. | Ford | If You Haven’t Looked At Ford Lately, Look Again |
| 6. | BMW | Sheer Driving Pleasure |

- | | | |
|----|-------------|----------------------------|
| 7. | Candy | The Twist You Can't Resist |
| 8. | Gillette | The Best A Man Can Get |
| 9. | Mc Donald's | I'm Lovin' It |

Few examples have been given above to depict how we conduct grammar classes. The average learners will also open up to answer exercises in grammar if it is taught with such interesting activities. Tenses, Parts of speech, contractions, vocabularies etc. becomes very familiar for the learners.



Teachers can instruct students to bring newspapers and can have discussion on topics of varied interests in the class. Usually slow learners and the students who have inhibitions can be brought out from frustrations. Teachers should be willing to spend quality time to motivate and act as a mentor to enable the student comes out from inhibitions. It can be conducted in the form of quiz where grammar can also be taught indirectly but in an interesting manner. When the teachers make special mention about the advertisements on TV and newspapers the students react effectively. Moreover it helps them to learn many new words unintentionally.

The biggest challenge among the teachers is to inculcate in the student the habit of reading. Proving to be an employable candidate in an interview and getting a job is not easy in this competitive world. Students are to be trained on various skills to prove their smartness in answering the questions at the time of interview. Francis Bacon, in his essay "Of Studies", has rightly pointed that "Reading maketh a fullman; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man."³ In the digitized milieu, only a unsubstantial minority have passion for reading and very few opt for descriptive writing. Elaboration is a trait rarely to be found in this fast paced era. Conducting activities like Group discussions, debates, Book Reviews guide the students to improve language skills and vocabulary.

The younger generation spend their hours on TRASH. If those hours were spent in reading instead, the empty time will be taken out. We are addicted and distracted by social media. So we at our institution have introduced this event as part of our Literary Club and are very successful also. Students have to be given freedom of choice to select and review books. Book reviews can come of a good help in inculcating the reading habit which is dying out. Instilling reading practice is the most effective way to enrich the treasure of vocabulary which is indispensable for better communication. Others present in the Book Review session can play the role of a critic. Students can gather together at a particular place and review the books they had read for the month and exchange it with their friends.

"When it comes to reading, one should be a jack of all trades, not a specialist. Make your reading opportunistic. If you have a chance, take it. If you don't have a chance, find one"

Says OrhanPamuk. Learners must often be exposed to large amount of comprehensive reading in order to make extensive reading successful. This will help to hone communication skills and help a few others improve collaboration skills. Strategy should be in such a way to formulate the majority of the learners to participate.

An engineering student has to read and interpret research papers, articles in technical journals, technical reports etc. to improve their reading speed. In an engineering classroom, where everything is related to technical learning undertaking lab experiments and project preparations, and where there is very little chances for language acquisition for the average learners and enrichment for the already equipped, Club activities are the only means of bringing out the creative talent of the students, which are otherwise given less significance.

"Tell me, and I'll forget, show me, and I may not remember, involve me, and I'll understand"

- so says an American proverb. This is what the club activities tend to do. Students when involved in club activities gain

"powerful tool for : understanding human experiences, both past and present; learning to adapt and to respect other's (often very different) ways of thinking, working and expressing themselves; and making decisions where there are no standard answers."(Martin)⁴

In engineering institutions, various clubs like **the Literary Club, the Theatre Society, the Quiz Club** can be formed through which exposure can be given to students of all level of learners to participate and improve their skills. Through these, we can easily facilitate the learning of the second language. The method of practising speaking and writing skill and also presentation skill in the second language develop the students' self-confidence in the foreign language the different genres of literature can be dwelt upon and explored here. Events and competitions like Extempore, Movie/Short film Review, Script Writing, Poem, Short story writing, Role plays, Describing pictures, Mock Interviews, Dialogue writing can be conducted through the Literary Club to sharpen the LSRW skills among students. We in our college through **the Literary Club**, conduct events that enhance the original skill of the learners. To mention a few:

1. **Crack the Gist:** A paragraph taken from a story was given and they have to assimilate into a story of their own.
2. **Talking Titans:** Students should personify a famous personality selected through chits. They were given an imaginary situation and asked to argue about why their character should be the one who gets the last life jacket on a sinking ship.
3. **A Lot can happen Over a Coffee:** A role play where each team was asked to prepare a hypothetical scenario, where two celebrities meet at a coffee shop and converse.
4. **The Switch:** The participants were given a list of fan fiction characters and they were supposed to describe them in the opposite way i.e. making the protagonist the antagonist and vice versa.
5. **Painting Analysis:** The students were shown classic painting visual about which they have to talk for 3 minutes.
6. **Block and Tackle:** It is an extempore activity. Each participant was given different controversial topic. They have to speak for the topic when they hear the word block and they have to speak against the topic when they hear tackle. They had to switch their stance accordingly in the given 2 minute's time.
7. **Inner Voice:** Participants were give six topics. On each topic they were asked to say slogans.
8. **Poem Writing:** The participants were asked to write a poem in 4 lines as per the instructions given to them.
1st line: Universal fact
2nd line: Supporting line 1
3rd line: contradicting line 1
4th line: supporting line 3
9. **Heeder:** Participants were prepared to listen to an audio recording and was asked to answer the given sets of multiple choice questions
10. **Taboo:** Participants took turn to describe a word to their partner which is written in the given card. They should not use the clues which are closely related to the word. Finding the maximum words within two minutes was fixed as the criteria for choosing winners.
11. **Headlines of Yesterday:** The participants were given different headlines and they have to write an eyewitness account in the first person in the time given. The participants with the creative write-ups were winners.
12. **The End:** The participants had to watch a short film which was paused in the middle. The challenge given to the participants was to predict and reconstruct a creative logical climax to the film. The participants with imaginative and propelling write-ups were selected.

13. **12341 Challenge:** This aimed to have a test at poetry and language. The participants were given a word “beautiful “and were asked to construct a micro poem. The micro poem should have the word beautiful in the first line and should have two words in the second line and three, four words in the subsequent lines. The fifth line should have only one word. The participants with best poems were selected for winners.

14. **Our Story:** The students are given different plots, on the basis of the given plot they have to write a story with the given word limits.

15. **Poetry of your Version:** The students were given a stanza of the poem. They have to complete the poem by adding a stanza above and below the given stanza.

Such activities we conduct at our institution on a monthly basis to ease the students from stress. They also participate interestingly and get relieve of their inhibition while take part in groups. Such kind of novel and challenge oriented activities in fact boost up the students’ communication and self-confidence and also their creative skills.

The activities must be well organised in such a way to develop thinking skills. Short stories can be discussed based on characterization, theme etc on various perspectives. Open ended stories can be given and the students can be asked to come out with interesting conclusions. Creative write-ups can be encouraged and the same can be highlighted in the classroom which motivates the others to write and learn. The beginning or the ending of the poetic verses can be given and they may be asked to complete the other end. This, in fact, helps the students to think on creative lines which generally they do not do. Role plays and Group discussions also help the learners overcome all inhibitions as they are stimulated to talk about subjects they are interested in and thereby they gain confidence. Group discussions act like brainstorming activity which not only bring the timid and the hesitant to express themselves; it incorporates various other skills of team work like leadership quality, listening intensively to others, keen observation and gaining varied perceptions for the same topic. Students tend to talk about this even after the class is over. Their knowledge gets enhanced when different thoughts are discussed. Through Mock Interviews, the students learn how to conduct them and respond to questions asked in interviews.

Conducting **Model United Nations (MUN)** an initiative by the Oxford University in 1921 is an educational simulation or an academic activity in which students can learn about diplomacy and can be given to create awareness among the participants about the political and economic happenings at the national and international level. This involves meticulous preparation and should be well structured because delegates represent various countries and hence, must be acquainted with that country’s economic and political scenario. Through this the students can be trained on various administrative and communicative skills as this is similar to the real functioning of the actual UN. To conduct MUN students must read extensively and prepare exhaustively about their topic. This helps the students to become well-informed and better citizens and gain confidence. The students also have an opportunity to be involved in preparing the study guide and documentation through which their writing skills are developed. In the two days of conference there are expert briefings and committee sessions wherein delegates are immersed in an environment that fosters growth and learning of English- the reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. **The outcome is that students are more confident in their public speaking and English skills! The student delegates’ research, debate, negotiates, present problems and vote on resolutions. To break the** “sitting at a desk for 8 hours a day” routine, these activities lead to improved cognitive skills, including critical thinking and problem solving. In addition to the cognitive benefits, exposure to new and unfamiliar cultures and backgrounds lead students to develop a greater understanding of the world around them. Students will ultimately be better prepared to succeed in a world that is more racially, ethnically and religiously diverse than ever before.⁵

The Theatre Society energises and awakens the participant for experimental and experiential learning. They also learn the art of theatrical production and the main aim of the society is to create link between the learners and the language on stage. Workshops can be organised for the students on acting, script writing and the like. Street Plays, short skits, one-act plays can be performed outdoors on social issues which will also become a Brand Building activity for the institution. This is quite difficult and challenging because the audience have to be retained until the play gets over as they are conducted in public places. These activities are greater aids in personality development for students. The whole process is inclusive of rehearsing and using of gestures, and paralinguistic features. It also helps in enhancing language proficiency

as drama necessitates the use of varied vocabulary for diverse situations and issues. Learning takes place involuntarily, when activities are engaging and memorable.

"As a personality-centred method, drama aims to develop creativity, spontaneity and communicative competence, preparing students to real-life situations with less difficulty."(Journal of Education)⁶

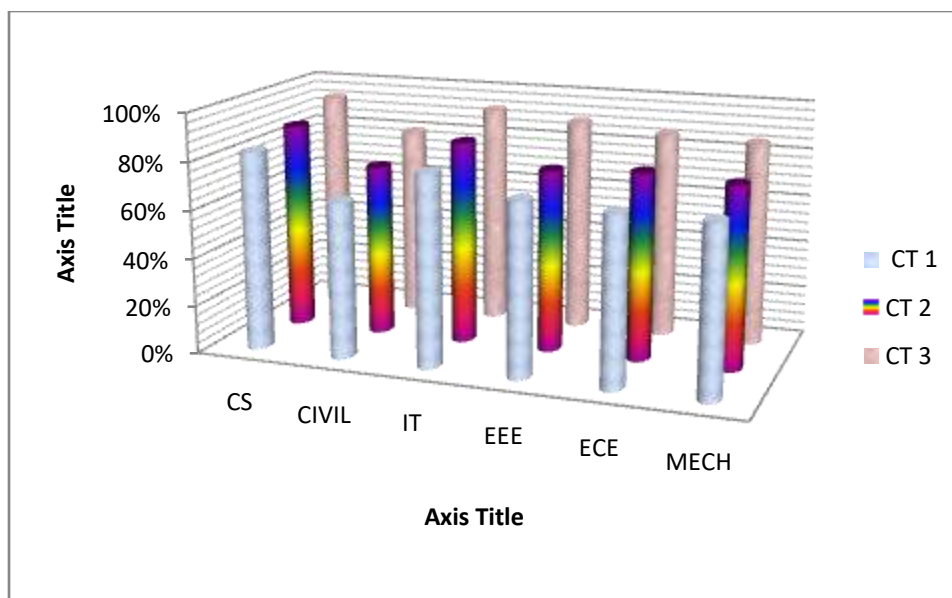
Learning takes place when activities are engaging and memorable. Theatre or drama provide a room not just for performance before an audience, but also for honing communication skills. It allows students to practise, observe and communicate effectively. Plays span time and space. In a theatre group, the participants will come across various cultures and time periods. Whether it is a foreign culture or one's own, there is always more to learn about cultures and they will be able to glean all they need to know. Also, language is very culture-specific. Therefore, exposure to varied cultures will certainly hone the student's language skills.

"Meaningful interaction is afforded by theatre, in contrast to workbook exercises or oral drills. Your ward will learn language purposefully and in a hands-on manner that will enable him to speak spontaneously in real life"⁷.

The engineering graduates generally opt for taking up a job or to pursue higher education. They are in need of professional help to pass exams like GRE, TOEFL, IELTS, GMAT etc., that mainly focuses on General Knowledge, aptitude, and vocabulary testing and so on. The **Quiz Club** helps the learners to prepare them for all competitive exams by conducting quizzes regularly. We in our campus conduct Quiz competitions on general and technical topics with the trained resource persons to formulate it in a professional way. Workshops are also conducted frequently by inviting Quiz masters to train them for the preparation of such examinations. Workshops are often conducted to train them for the preparation of such examinations. **Pub Quiz:** You don't need to hang out in an actual pub. The teacher asks multiple choice questions and the teams are given 60 seconds to discuss and agree upon an answer. You could relate questions from course materials. The activities are kept at a mediocre level so that all students can make interaction more comfortably. The topics are chosen which are interesting, relevant and are beneficial to the students.

Quizzes progress or increase one's understanding of things, either general or in a specific area. The teacher can design the quiz to encourage an enjoyable method to learning and in the course facilitate the student's to improve general knowledge and technical knowledge as well. What's interesting about conducting quizzes at classroom levels in engineering colleges is that it enables learners to think from a diverse angle or merely 'to think out of the box'. Hence, the facilitator can give the students an opportunity to frame the quiz and present to his peers. This, in turn, gives the presenter tremendous self-confidence and encourages others to take their turns.

Quiz clubs also promote a healthy discussion among participants in order to learn from each other. New words are learnt, new ideas are inculcated and therefore the competitions may be used in Schools and Universities to assist in language growth and in particular a topic area of learning. Some educational institutes employ it as a short evaluation or instrument to assess the development in the knowledge, ability and / or skill of their students either on a common level or controlled to a definite field for example, science, math etc. Aiding in the team building process, quizzes encourage group harmony, whether in organisations, school or just a group of acquaintances.



The teachers at the college level should be friendly and build a healthy relationship with their students. Teachers should get rid of the conventional type of instruction and should not disappoint the learners. At all levels students need motivation and sincere appreciation from teachers. Classes can be made student centred. Teachers can build lot of activities because activity based teaching helps the students to understand better. No learning is complete if it improves only the CGPA. Education and learning becomes wholesome if it brings an overall development in a student and thereby enabling him to face the challenges life offers outside the campus. Employers also look for qualities off the academic record to pick out their employees. Club activities, be it theatrical or other literary activities, do away with the inhibitions by bringing them on to the dais before a large audience. Students get to know that mere doing is not enough; it has to be a matter of doing it correctly. Working with different types of people demands cooperative work, promptness, adaptability and flexibility, handling pressure, self-discipline , dedication, willingness to accept responsibility, self - confidence and leadership skills and above everything else, the acquisition of problem-solving skills too.

II. CONCLUSION:

Towards the end there is always a noticeable change in the students. It is a Herculean task but the way it is organised, and how it can be used irrespective of the prescribed curriculum, and how the teachers of the department focus on getting empowered themselves makes all the difference. The learners, particularly from professional streams are given more autonomy which boosts their confidence and motivates them to perform. As language teachers, we should update ourselves and use appropriate methodologies and technologies as per the requirements of the learners. Some teachers are willing to walk an extra mile and improve the language skills of students. Such inspired teachers and their interesting activities will help learners to rectify errors at the spoken and written level. In the long run, it helps the students gain confidence to acquire language without the assistance of a teacher. The role of a teacher here is to motivate them with regard to the individual's need.

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