

Role of English as a Medium of Communication for Engineering Students

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Abstract

This paper briefly explains about the significance of English language in the field of engineering both in local and global contexts. In the present world engineering is one of the most chosen fields by undergraduate students and based on literature reviews for necessary data, it has been found that English language is an efficient part of the engineering curriculum as it is the widely accepted language throughout the globe. Almost all activities starting from class discussion and viva-voce to oral presentation of research papers and projects are done in English. It is also the most important way of gathering information from various printed, Audio-visual or electronic media sources. Especially for non-native English speakers in the field of engineering mastering English is even more important, not only for their academic life but also for their career in future. Moreover, without having a good command on English, it is very difficult for the engineering students to grasp the underlying principles and ideas that authors try to convey through their books and papers. In the present world English is acting as a bridge language to establish communication between people who do not share a native language and therefore it is the basic requirement for engineering students.

Keywords: Engineering, bridge language, communication, native language.

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Introduction

In the present context, the English language, which was brought to Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers in the middle of 5th Century AD, has become a common language of communication among the people around the world irrespective of their nationality, community and ethnicity. English has gained a lot of popularity in the past few decades, it has been globalized and its use has been widespread. People involved in various fields and professions all around the world are using it as a means of communication to acquire information, conducting researches, publishing papers, conducting seminars etc. English has also been a medium of religion for spreading peace and harmony throughout the world.

According to the Babel Magazine, approximately 20% out of the world's total population speaks English and the percentage is still rising. However, most of them are not native English speakers. In addition to the fact that it is widely spoken, it is also the most commonly studied foreign language in the world. If we talk about India, almost every child irrespective of their religion and community is encouraged to learn English from their childhood as a second language after their mother tongue. Therefore, whenever a non-native speaker encounters a country with a different language other than their mother tongue, the knowledge of English serves as a bridge language which connects the non-native speaker with the concerned country. That is why English is not just a language but it is also an important factor which determines the career prospect of any student. As Reimer rightly [12] states:

“...No doubt, technical know-how is important but it should be presented with an excellent communication skills mostly oral communication and presentation skills as these are considered as the single biggest factor in determining student’s career success or failure.”

English as a must for making engineers ‘industry ready’

Engineering is a vast field which is not restricted to any particular country and therefore the engineering projects are now planned and implemented across the cultural and national boundaries. So the engineers must have a sound knowledge of English in order to establish cross-border communication. Nowadays, students in every field are not restricted to their academic curriculum. They are always found busy in doing some extracurricular activities which includes working on project that deals with latest technologies, writing research papers on some latest inventions or discoveries, etc— all these require a proper command on English in order to gather information and. It also helps to establish a communication with experienced people from around the globe with a different mother tongue that enables a professional to excel in their respective fields. After a lot of reviews, it was found that employers or industries now seek for engineering graduates with proper soft skills along with technical knowledge but soft skills have always got an upper hand. In this context M. J. Reimer [13] states that:

“...Engineering education should encourage the development of communication skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking and interpersonal skills along with team work, not just Role of English as a Medium of Communication for Engineering Students because these are the qualities

that industries look for but because these are actually the basic building blocks of any tertiary education.”

Aspiring Minds, an employability and certification company, conducted a survey on 30,000 students from 500 engineering colleges in the country. The students were selected on the basis of a test conducted on an automated tool that measures listening and speaking skills. As a result, the following things were found:

- Only 6.8% of the engineers shows the ability to respond or speak spontaneously.
- Only 7.1% of engineers can speak English fluently.
- Around 61% of engineers possess grammar skills no better than a class 7 student.
- More than 51% of engineering graduates are not employed based on their spoken English scores.
- Around 97% of engineering graduates in the country cannot get jobs in corporate sectors due of their inability to speak English properly.

If we look into the individual academic and professional perspectives on the importance of English language, we will find that in the countries like India where English is not the first language, proficiency in English is the most important step for an engineer towards the industry. Nowadays it is compulsory to teach English as a second but important language in every school from the junior classes so that the children can learn it properly and effectively. Most of the people around the globe who are non-native English speakers are learning English as their second language because it is connecting us throughout the world. Charlemagne has rightly said that:

“To have another language is to possess a second soul”.

Language is the best way to express ourselves, expressing any idea and making others understand that idea properly is the task of an engineer. The more number of languages we know the more effectively we will be able to connect through the world. In this process English language plays the integral role.

Communication: An important part of soft skills

Soft skills are those special skills which cannot be taught in the class, unlike hard skills which can be proven or measured easily, soft skills are quite intangible which cannot be quantified or measured by any examination. Soft skills are basically a part of our reflex action that is reflected from our behavior or our perspective towards the problems or situations that we encounter in our daily life. Research from the Society of Human Resource and Management has found that soft skills are those skills that employers actually care about. Soft skills mostly include:

- Analytical thinking
- Problem Solving Ability

The professional areas which get enhanced by using English as a Medium of Communication for Engineering Students are:

- Leadership quality
- Verbal and written communication

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- Teamwork ability
- Critical Observation
- Resolution of Conflict

Kathy Robinson, the founder of Boston career-coaching firm Turing Point says that

“Soft skills are key to building relationships, gaining visibility and creating more opportunities for advancement”.

Soft skills help in facilitating human connections. Engineers can be the best at what they do but if they lack in soft skills then they are actually limiting their chances of progress in their career. Of all the soft skills, communication plays the most important role, it improves the chances of building a good relationship with the co-workers, seniors and juniors. If an engineer is capable of expressing the what, when, why, where and how of a project clearly then he will have the highest demand in the job market. This is the basic reason of why employers look for engineers with an excellent standard of communication skills.

English is just a language, not a parameter of intelligence

This is completely true that English is just a language of communication, people should not be judged on the basis of their English proficiency. Nowadays it has become quite common to judge a person's intelligence level with his ability to speak English fluently which is completely baseless. Not all people who cannot speak English are uneducated or lack talent. For example, most of the people of Japan are not good English speakers; but that does not mean that

they are not educated or intelligent, in fact Japan is counted in the list of the countries with most advanced technologies in the world. Proficiency in English, therefore, enables us to communicate and interpret our ideas, opinions to people from any other culture and country. What it does not do is to helping in making and cultivating those ideas. A person may have a good command over English but that does not mean that he has got an innovative brain. Wilhelm von Humboldt has said it well that

“Language is the infinite use of finite means”

The above quotation says that it is always possible to create infinite sentences i.e. to express ourselves in infinite different ways with the use of limited set of rules or vocabulary. It is not mandatory to have a complete knowledge of English for communication, just having a basic knowledge of grammars is sufficient to communicate.

Conclusion

This paper gives a brief idea of how important and necessary English is in every field especially in engineering. This paper also talks about why English is required for engineers and why is it compulsory in today’s world to learn English from the beginning. Just by having technical knowledge will no longer help in getting a satisfactory job in any field. Engineers must develop soft skills throughout their academic life and among all soft skills, communication plays an important role. Learning English is not a herculean task. There is a famous proverb in English “Where there is a will, there is a way”. Learning any new thing requires dedication, passion and motivation. Dr. A.P.J Abdul has rightly said that “To succeed in your mission you must have a

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single-minded approach towards your goal”. Since the demand of English is rising day by day, it has become very important to have a basic knowledge of English language, after all it is the one who will come to the rescue in difficult times whenever someone is surrounded by the people of different countries having different mother tongues. “Language is the light of mind” as quoted by John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher; therefore, it is good to learn as many languages as we can, it helps to experience the flavour of the heritage of different countries and creates a strong inter-personal and intra-racial relationship with the globe.



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