

Enhancing Employability for Engineering Students through Oral Communication

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Abstract: *It is almost impossible to ignore the importance of communication in our daily lives. Good oral communication skills are tickets to success both in academics and in the business world. A report by the Business Higher Education forum has come up with their survey results that “newly hired graduates have impressive academic skills but they lack in oral skills”. The study focuses on how to enhance the oral communication skills not only in classrooms but also outside classrooms. The interest to write about this paper stems as a part of my profession to teach English to undergraduate and post-Graduate students in engineering college. I have tried to examine why students lack communication skills and why they are reluctant when it comes to improving the communication skills. The intentions here are to suggest ways through which oral communications can be enhanced for the better employability. This paper is important because it will suggest students in developing oral communication skills which is often a neglected situation in classrooms and outside classrooms in colleges.*

Keywords: Oral Communication, verbal, speed, employability

1. Introduction

The study of spoken language has a long tradition reaching back to a time when there was no specific interest in communicative aspect. But at present good verbal communication is required in almost every field of life, whether it's for a job or to flatter a woman. Well, it's not that difficult. The art of communication becomes very simple if we keep few things in mind like if there is the proper relation between mind and the words we speak and if we are prepared about what we are going to talk. Oral communication always has proximity over written communication since it helps with immediate interchange of opinion. It also provides with instant feedback. Another advantage is that it involves the participation of all present..At present, to be successful, it is important that one has to become a good communicator. Even though a student may have a sound technical knowledge, but he may not be successful if he is not able to communicate his learning's. The communication is not only restricted to sharing your knowledge, but also it is important that people should be able to understand what you want to convey. Oral communication skills have been included in the school/college curriculum to help students acquire fluency in the language. But what is obvious that it is the most neglected area in the English language learning. The word 'employability', in the context of higher education, implies ability to be employed in a 'graduate job 'But according to a definition employability is: 'A set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.'

When employers are asked what they look for when hiring graduates, they are inclined to say that having a good degree is necessary but it is little more than a ticket to compete for a job; and chances are improved when applicants have credible claims in respect of 'key' or 'transferable' skills;

Knight and Yorke, 2003 have described employability as” a blend of understanding, skilful practices, efficacy beliefs (or

legitimate self-confidence) and reflectiveness (or metacognition).”

2. Current Educational Practices

The ability to speak clearly, eloquently and effectively has been recognized as the hallmark of an educated person. The communication skills are one of the oldest disciplines, but are new to academics which have been added as subject to the curriculum in engineering colleges. The Communication skill as subject in college is concerned with improving students' ability to communicate in a variety of ways, but the subject itself is never given its due importance either by Faculty or by students. In the recent past students from remote areas and villages have shown interest towards engineering streams, but due to the poor communication skills they have to face problems in their syllabi. Even though few students may be intelligent but due to poor communication skills they too face problems.

Subjects like communication skills if seriously implemented, will certainly help students to refine their speaking and writing skills. Writing skills can be developed by giving assignments, but to develop speaking skills it is necessary that it should be done under proper guidance. Teaching of oral communication skills is the most neglected area in the English learning programme. Though we find Engineering Colleges equipped with Language lab having sophisticated Software to teach communication skills to students, but students themselves evade learning. Actually the results revealed that most of the teachers use Lectures and Question-Answer method more than any other technique to teach oral communication. If some other Techniques can be adopted which will generate interest of the students in learning then the students can be retained for learning. Students will also find English classes interesting as they will be learning English language in a meaningful way.

Reasons for Ineffective oral communication

As Abraham Lincoln has rightly said “It is better to keep one's mouth shut, and be thought a fool, than to open it and resolve all doubt”. Oral communication creates misunderstanding, confusion, distortion of facts and leads to communication breakdown. The broad reasons for ineffective oral communication can be overconfidence, language problem, personality, status consciousness, inattentiveness, frequent interruptions and many more. Although self confidence is an essential element of effective oral communication, but over –confidence can affect the purpose of oral communication.

Language is also another reason, because receiver should be able to understand what the sender has to say, if the language used for oral communication is not understood than oral communication becomes ineffective Even by using difficult words, ambiguous words and sentence clarity in language can be affected. The negligence of the receiver, status consciousness and even the emotions of the speaker should be controlled at the time of exchanging information. Not only this, but wrong interpretation also causes failure of oral communication. To overcome these situations, students must consider the few questions in mind.

- What do I wish to communicate?
- What important points do I want the listener to remember?
- What do I expect them to do with the ideas I have communicated?
- What should they convey it to others?

Approaches that promotes listening

Oral communication is intertwined with one's ability to listen. Listening as in language is a very important component of oral communication. The silent period is often the most crucial in the language development. Good listeners are good responders. Good listeners know how to negotiate meaning, give feedback, ask for clarification, maintain topic to make understanding or comprehension complete. According to a Chinese Proverb

“To listen well, is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well, and is as essential to all true conversation.”

We may often think that, having good communication skills is all about the ability to speak well....Or all about “Speaking.” And this is true also because 70% of communication accounts for speaking; we speak more than we write. We are right, but only partially because Verbal Communication has another very important part “Listening”. For effective oral communication we need to develop our skills of Listening.

Parameters of effective speech

Knowing how to speak and developing it, one must remember certain factors which make it possible to say anything effectively. These are Speed, Clarity, Punctuation, Pronunciation, Fluency and Familiarity. These factors can be used both in formal situations as well as informal talks. Let's consider these factors one by one

Speed, is the number of words spoken per minute. It is good to speak 110 to 120 wpm. So slowing down in the rate of speech is the first step towards better speech. Our body

language should be relaxed. We should not stiffen up. Do not speak in a hurry, as it will make the listener think that you are confused or you have confined the speech. Making eye contact is very important. Always speak clearly.

Clarity accounts for another important factor which can make our communication effective Clarity is there only if the voice is audible and free from disturbances. So it is always better to judge the acoustics of the room. In order to make clarity out of chaos,

The punctuation refers to using various kinds of pauses to give emphasis on speech. It operates along with our breathing; we make pauses when we speak. Punctuation may also be used to attach rather idiosyncratic meaning to a message. Communication axiom suggests that "the nature of a relationship is contingent upon the punctuation of the communication sequences between communicants" (Watzlawick, et al., 1967, P. 59).

The next important factor is Pronunciation It refers to the utterances of words. Considering two most common languages via English and Hindi It is obvious that English is not “Phonetic” which means we do not always say a word the same way that we spell it. But Hindi is Phonetic because we always say a word how it is spelled. So it is always advisable to use a good dictionary to practice pronunciation or take the help of the native speaker.

Another important factor is Fluency. It can be understood as able to express oneself easily. That can also mean a comfortable working ability with the language. Developing Fluency is a matter of having all the other parameters in place.

One should be careful while expressing different feelings with words, word stress, tone, pitch and inflection. The expression is better known for transformation of ideas into words, and also the outward manifestation of a mood or a disposition by way of words.

Techniques to improve Oral communication

Communication has paralinguistic cues and is an interaction between two or more people. Paralinguistic cues like Gestures, Body Language, Facial Expressions, Head and Body Movement can affect the oral communication to a great extent. Meta-linguistic Cues like Ability to talk about, analyze, and judge language can be the reasons for misunderstanding oral communication. So to make effective oral communication Speaking and expressing your thoughts and feelings in a clear and non-defensive manner is the primary need. Being aware of your body language and what it communicates to others can to a certain extent improve oral communication.

Talking about strategies, oral communication can also be improved if the speaker focuses his attention on Articulation, voice and grammar.

- Articulation refers to the manner in which the speaker produces sounds.

- Grammar is the manner in which the speaker uses sentence structure, word endings, and vocabulary.
- Voice refers to the pitch, loudness, and quality of a speaker's voice.

Voice, articulation, and grammar have cultural influences also. So the students should have Clear articulation of vowels, consonants and diphthongs, accurate pronunciation of words, should place correct stress on the syllable and use of words from the vocabulary to express acceptable meanings. Try to monitor your own oral production and use various strategic devices—pauses, fillers, self-corrections, backtracking—to enhance the clarity of the messages. Speeches, presentations, discussions are all forms of oral communication. Oral communication is generally recommended when the communication matter is of temporary kind or where a direct interaction is required. Face to face communication like meetings, lectures, conferences, interviews, etc. is significant so as to build a rapport and trust. “So Oral communication is considered to be a core aspect of employability” (Knight and Yorke, 2007).

Just because you understand what you mean, it doesn't mean that the others will.. Hence we must use a variety of communication techniques to both understand and be understood. Cultural differences must also be recognized in non-verbal communication. Critical success factor in life is that the majority of your perceived ability comes from how you communicate. If only we follow the above mention strategies we can truly polish our true potentials to become an effective oral communicator. To Become an Effective oral Communicator always keep in mind that

- Wear a Winning Smile
- Be open and Confident.
- Be Yourself.
- Be Positive.
- Be Courteous and Attentive

Developing Effective oral communication skills in classrooms

As with most personal skills, oral communication cannot be taught. Instructors can only point the way. So as always, practice is essential, both to improve your skills generally and also to make the best of each individual. Let me sum up using a very famous quotation by Ben Johnson, **‘To speak’** and **‘to speak well’** are two things. **A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks.**

When an oral communication course is included in the curriculum it that tends to be narrower rather than broad in scope. Speaking, as we all know is a fundamental tool at every step of language learning process, so a favourable atmosphere should be provided to the students where they will be telling stories, describing anything, summarising incidences, discussing the current issues, reformulating, assessing, justifying the learning process. Although arguing, convincing and debating may prove to be essential throughout their lives. Apart from the positive qualities shown by instructor to encourage active students participation in classroom discussion, the skills of the instructor may also affect the classroom environment. The variety of teaching techniques employed by the teachers will encourage the students to be more active, not feel bored or

depressed during the class.(Mohd. Yusof Abdullah, &et al 2012)

But students should be encouraged daily to express with confidence in an environment which enriches their communication experiences. Task based approach seems to be very good for teaching the oral communication skills in academic settings.(M.Mujibur Rahaman, 2010) Above all this, Class participation is must for the students to develop oral communication skills. Interest must be generated with the students by teaching the students the subject related vocabulary, the true expressions and correct sentence structures in a very direct and explicit manner to enrich their linguistic background. According to Davis (2009), student's enthusiasm and willingness to participate in a classroom through these verbal engagements will create a conducive classroom environment.

Oral communication skills: beyond the classrooms.

All language teachers should strive for pupils becoming communicatively competent. In order for this to happen the teacher should encourage the pupils' own initiative to express themselves orally in the English language classes. Speaking is always a very important part of language learning. While learning a language many students lack confidence in their ability to participate in activities like group discussion and role play. Lightbown & Spada emphasizes using the target language in conversations and other interactive language activities. Through interactive activities language teachers can give students different situations to handle while practicing language learning.

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As we all are aware that oral communication skills are more valued at the workplace. If the student master these skills while pursuing their studies that will definitely add to their personality and enhance their employability. Those who possess the good oral communication skills are sure to create a positive impression despite having low grades in their academics. They are more likely to get better opportunities for placement in the job. Also, they may be more respected and trusted.

During their course of study students should develop professional courtesy and respect. They should avoid casual attitude towards the faculty and try to practice less an informal, interactive style, which is mostly interpreted as a form of disrespect. Students should be encouraged to practice and assume formality.

In addition to the typical classroom activities all the departments in the college can create specific activities that will enhance their oral communication skills. The following suggestions will help students to gain confidence while applying their skills in more practical circumstances.

- 1) Practicing Oral presentations in Department help students to practice oral communication. Interacting with the audience at the time of presentation in the form of questions will help them to practice calm and thoughtful responsiveness.
- 2) Different speakers from the Job placement office on Campus or the Alumni can be invited to share their perspective on the student behaviours. This will help the students to involve themselves with an adult-to- adult conversation rather than being didactic.
- 3) Students should be assured that if they exhibit maturity, assume responsibility and learn to communicate carefully then they would learn more valuable skills beyond their curriculum and will be able to communicate orally in more practical manner.

3. Conclusion

Spoken words, act as a powerful medium for influencing people to fulfill their tasks. Good orators have mastery on their speech, through which they are able to mould the opinions of their audience. So it is very essential to use clear and lucid language where words are couched in familiar phrases in which listeners are familiar. By this one can form their own personal style. It is logical to conclude that Oral Communication courses should also find a place as written communication courses in core curricula in college,. Although Faculty, administrators and even the Potential employers show the concern for students' lack of effective oral communication skills, but very few Colleges and Universities have taken initiative to redefine the syllabus for improving oral communication skills for enhancing their employability which is the need of the hour. Teachers with encouraging personalities should generate interest in learning oral communication skills and cherish the students for their efforts. It is true that we do not always find a conducive environment for speaking hence it is good that our self knowledge and objective consciousness should act as a guiding factor. Effective oral communication skills are a critical element in one's career and personal lives thus we should try to integrate oral communication skills into everyday learning. And not restrict ourselves only to classroom teaching and learning. Higher education institutions have already taken initiative to make their graduates employable but more important is for the students to realize the importance of oral communication skills.

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