



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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Challenges in teaching English to Engineering Students: A Contemporary Perspective

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Abstract

Preparing Engineering students to meet contemporary needs of the industry has become a herculean task due to the ever increasing expectations. It has become all the more difficult during the time of Covid-19 due to the unexpected uncertainties lurking in close vicinity. The unprecedented surge of this enigmatic virus has stalled the entire human enterprise. The process of teaching and learning, especially during the time of Covid-19 pandemic experienced an epiphany. It has propelled teaching and learning to another extent. It is in a way, a clarion call to the teaching fraternity to prepare the students of the next generation to meet the uncertainties of life. Hence, the responsibility of a teacher in this pathetic situation is to prepare students to confront this new normal with alacrity and confidence. The aim of this paper is to explore and analyze the challenges confronted by English language teachers in helping students brace this new lease of life.

Key Words: Engineering Students, English Language, Teaching and Learning

Introduction

Teaching English to second and foreign learners is a difficult task because of various social, psychological and linguistic factors that go into the process of learning a new language. English language in India is considered the second language in most of the states. The advancements in science and technology made the world as a global village. Similarly, English language also has attained the status of global language because of the multi-dimensional usage by the people. The rise of English language as a global language has reduced the restrictions, problems that the early language learners of English had to face in India. Earlier, it was difficult for people to hear or listen to native speaker's language. The only interface they had was their teachers and some foreigners who visited India now and then. Due to the advancements in science and technology the gap has been reduced to a large extent. Now we are able to hear, speak and listen to native English language. The interaction between two people in English language has become very common. But, the fact of the matter is that, still most of the students, especially engineering students lag behind in using English language for various communicative purposes. Most of them fail to reach the expected standards set by various industries and higher learning academic institutions. In view of enhancing employability skills, especially English language communication skills, the government of Andhra Pradesh took several measures. The following are the two important initiatives taken by the government of Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh Government (AP) and Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE) in partnership with the British Council aim to improve the English language proficiency and employability skills of 100,000 college students at select higher education institutes in Andhra Pradesh." (<https://www.britishcouncil.in/about/press/launch-andhra-pradesh-higher-education-english-communication-skills-project>). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Thursday (18-11-21) between the University of Cambridge and the Urban Development Department of Andhra Pradesh, under which training in English language skills would be imparted to teachers and students under the Municipal department." (<https://indianexpress.com/article/education/andhra-govt-ties-up-with-cambridge-university-to-develop-english-proficiency-among-teachers-students-7137937/>).

Education during Covid-19

In the field of education, all the academic institutions were shut down. But, they did not close the doors of education. Education continued in some form or the other. All most all the academic institutions took initiatives to continue the education in the best suitable and available form. Even though the education continued to some extent the fruits of education are far from the reality. Most of the students fail to come to terms with education. They could not concentrate like they could before Covid-19. It has become a serious issue to most of the teaching fraternity to make students stay focused for a few minutes. The practical exposure to skill oriented subjects was almost nil. Fine tuning the skills of students has become very difficult task during the Covid-19 epidemic. Hence, teachers need to run an extra mile in order to reap the expected fruits.

The present situation

The unprecedented surge of Covid-19 cases shattered the dreams of the world. Human existence has become a question mark. Many people lost their lives fighting against this vicious, vulnerable and draconian virus. Thanks to people who worked day in and day out to bring out a vaccine that would in a way reduce the onslaught of Virus attack. But, the situation is still not out of danger and still some people are waging a war against this fatalistic Corona Virus-19. It has engulfed all most three years of human existence and activity.

Teaching English to engineering Students

Preparing engineering students to meet the ever expanding demands of the industry has been an onerous task to teachers. This has become even more challenging and arduous undertaking during the time of Covid-19 pandemic. In order to identify the challenges encountered by English teachers the researcher has undertaken a study. The researcher administered a questionnaire to English teachers teaching in engineering colleges. The questionnaire consists of both open ended and close ended questions. Finally, suggestions were made by English faculty members to enhance communication skills of students.

Methodology

In order to understand the perceptions of English teachers teaching in engineering colleges in the state of Andhra Pradesh on online teaching platforms used by the teachers and the skills required by the students, the researcher designed a questionnaire consisting of 14 questions. The questionnaire consists of both open ended and close ended questions. As Brown and Rodgers asserted “research today requires the use of both qualitative and quantitative research tools and typically combines several of the research types” (2002: 247). The present study also utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods of study with a view to obtain better results. Apart from the survey conducted, the researcher also included the valuable suggestions given by English teachers during his private conversation with them. Participants The participants of the study are eleven teachers teaching English language and communication skills in various engineering colleges in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Data Collection Tools Of the Study

Questionnaire designed for the purpose is used as the primary tool for receiving information from teachers. Private and informal interaction with teachers. Limitations of the study the researcher could not administer the questionnaire to more number of teachers due to some unavoidable, administrative constraints and work schedules. Results Analysis The following paragraphs present the analyses of the survey conducted and represent the views of English teachers on teaching English language to engineering students.

What Are the Platforms Used For Teaching English on Line during Covid-19

Among ten teachers who responded to the above question, two teachers mentioned that they used Google meet, one teacher used Zoom, four teachers mentioned that they used Google meet, Zoom and Web ex and three teachers mentioned that they used other teaching platforms which were not included in the questionnaire.

Table 1.

Teaching platform	Number of Participants
Google meet	2
Zoom	1
Web ex	0
All the above	4
Others	3

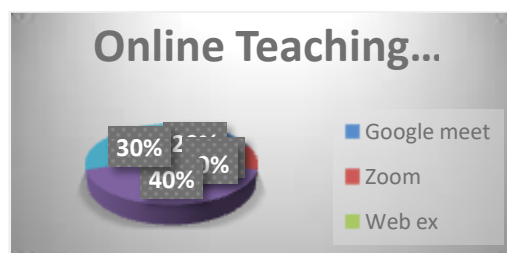


FIGURE.1

The information furnished by teachers to online platforms used by them gives an indication that most of the used Google meet, Zoom and Webex. It is also an indication that teachers used different platforms to teach.

Are you comfortable with teaching English online The above question was asked in order to understand whether English teachers are comfortable using online platforms to teach English.

TABLE: 2

Option	Number of Participants
Yes	6
No	1
May be	4

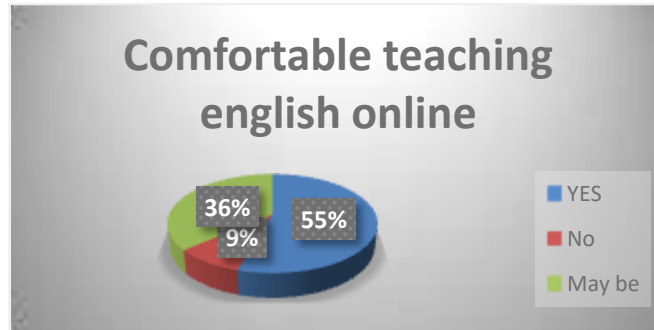


FIGURE.2

The data presented above illustrates that six teachers were comfortable, one teacher mentioned that he/she was not comfortable using online platforms for teaching English and four teachers opted option ‘May be’ which is an indication that they were not sure. From the above data it can be concluded that most of them were comfortable using online platforms for teaching English.

What are the difficulties you faced while teaching English online to engineering students

(Please mention at least one or two)

The answer to the above question varied from teacher to teacher. Some of the responses were:

“Signal problem”

“Tough to monitor every student. Every student is not the same but via online we miss that personal touch”.

“Need to spend more time on notes preparation & typing this and I technical problems

No face-to-face interaction, No control over listeners”

“Follow up is difficult”

“Network issues”

“No interaction”

“Difficult to access the students learning”

“Absence of their body language”

The above responses from the teachers give an indication that there are several issues related to online teaching which needs to be resolved in order to make online teaching a better option during the times when off-line mode of teaching is not possible.

In your opinion, which method of teaching is more beneficial to engineering students?

The following are the responses of teachers on teaching methodology.

TABLE: 3

Teaching Methodology	Number of Participants
Online	0
Offline	6
Both	4

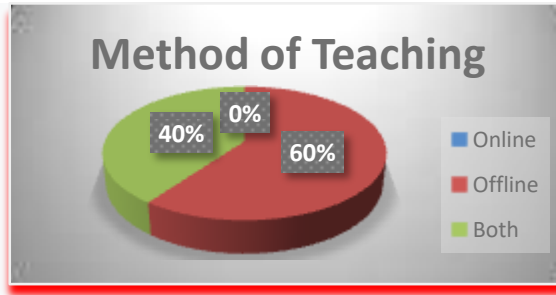


Figure 3.

The information provided by teachers of English is an indication that they don't prefer teaching English online alone, six teachers mentioned that they prefer off-line mode of teaching, four teachers mentioned that they would like to have combination of both the methods for teaching English. From the above it can be concluded that the best way to teach English is Off-line as mentioned above.

What is the most difficult language skill to impart to students?

The table below presents the information provided by teachers for the question aforementioned.

Difficult English language skill to teach/impart	Number of Participants
Listening	3
Speaking	4
Reading	0
Writing	4

TABLE: 4

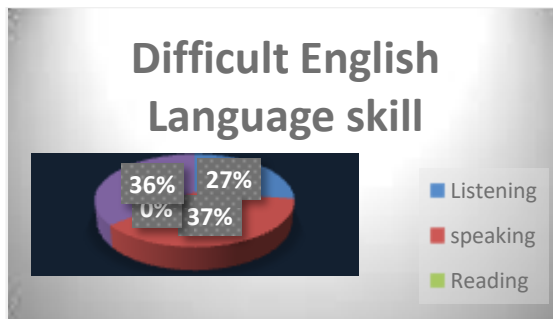
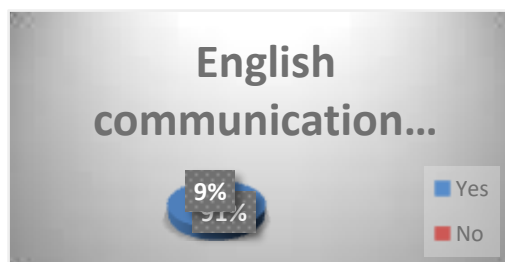


FIGURE.3

The data provided gives an indication that almost all the skills are difficult to teach/ impart with an exception to Reading. **As an English teacher, do you think that engineering students lag behind in their English language communication skills?** The data provided by the teachers of English about students' English communication skills indicate that most of the engineering students lag behind in their communication skills.

Engg. Students lag behind in communication skills	Number of Participants
Yes	10
No	1



Ten teachers except one, mentioned that engineering students lag behind in their English language communication skills. In the following question the researcher made an attempt at understanding the reasons for lack of required English language communication skills. The following are the views of teachers:

“Students focus more on acquiring technical knowledge”

“English language teaching fails to meet the needs of the present generation”

“Lack of interest”

“There is no stimulating platform to horn the English language skills of the students”

“Lack of proper accent and intonation patterns”

“Lack of required English grammar knowledge”

“Less focus on some of the English language skills and more focus on one or two language skills”

“Misguidance and lack of clarity among students,teachers and parents”

“Rural background and less focus on English language skills”

“No proper practice”

As mentioned above by the teachers, the reasons for lack of required English language communication skills are numerous. **Which component/area of English needs to be focused more in order to make students competent in their English language communication?**

Through The above question, the researcher would like to understand the perceptions of teachers on the component/area of English needs to be focused more in order to make students in their English language communication. The options given are vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing and all the above. All the teachers unanimously opted ‘all the above’ which is an indication that all the areas of English language should be given equal priority to make student competent in his/her English language communication skills. In the present situation, even though the objective of the course is comprehensive development of all the skills (Listening,Speaking, Reading and Writing), more emphasis is given to some components which decide the fate of both teachers and students. Another important issue worth considering at this juncture is evaluation method designed to award marks to students. It is not an exaggeration to mention that still most of the engineering colleges test memory of the students and not practical skills of the students. This requires a kind of revival the way the English examination is conducted and allocation of marks to various components. It is only when the skills are tested one can expect expected results in the near future, or else students secure more than 70% marks still fail to construct meaningful sentence in a given situation. Hence, the mind set of students, teachers, parents and college managements should be oriented towards upgradation of English language skills rather than focusing on marks which are based on the memory.

Through the following question, the researcher sought the valuable suggestions of teachers teaching English to enhance communication skills of students.

What are your suggestions to improve English language communication skills of engineering students

The following are the suggestions given by teachers More focus should be on oral performance Conduct more classroom activities.Better materials to be introduced not just the textbook. Teaching should evoke keen interest Regular practice of all LSRW Skills. Provide stimulating ambience/situation/context to hone English language skills. The teachers and the management should not view English as a subject to be taught, but a skill to be imparted and developed”.

Observations/Suggestions

Considering the views mentioned by English teachers and the observations made during my personal interaction with teachers teaching English to engineering students, it can be stated that teaching English should be done with a view to fine tune skills of English language required for communication and not just marks alone. All the skills like Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing should be given equal priority in teaching and evaluation. Giving more importance to one of the skills might debilitate him/her in another skill leading to ineffective English language communicator.

Conclusion

English language communication skills are very essential to engineering students because of the world of opportunities it would offer. Hence, it is the responsibility of teachers, parents, the college managements, and the institutes of higher learning to make students understand the importance of English language communication skills so that optimum results can be obtained in the contemporary world.

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