

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

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## **The Discrepancies in the Pace of Language Comprehension of Management Quota and Government Quota Students of Engineering Colleges**

**P. Malathy, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate**

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## **Introduction**

Reimer (2002) aptly points out, “Teaching English to Engineers is a delicate and demanding matter in terms of content, methods and techniques and deciding which are appropriate for this particular area of Engineering and English.” (p. 93). In addition, in India, the stated goal of almost every engineering student is to become a practicing engineer, rather getting a well-paid job. So, more often than not, the curriculum and even daily activities of most engineering students revolve around the goal of ultimate job placement as an engineer. Thus, every student in an engineering college is expected to move towards his or her recruitment as a well-paid engineer in a systematic fashion. The level of competence in English along with the level of competence in the engineering discipline, in this context, plays a very crucial role.

## **A Heterogeneous Class**

Broadly speaking, there are two categories of engineering colleges in the state of Tamilnadu: the first category consists of the privately owned and managed engineering colleges with practically no financial support from the State or Central government. The second category of engineering colleges receives some sort of financial support from the State or Central Government. The vast majority of the engineering colleges in the state come under the first category of colleges managed by private institutions.

There are also two categories of students in every privately managed engineering college in the state.

As per the rules of enrollment, these privately managed colleges of engineering are required to accept the students selected for enrollment by the state government. These students pay only the fees specified by the state government. On the other hand, these private colleges are also allowed a specific number of students under the management quota. These students enrolled under the Management Quota (MQ) usually pay hefty fees in various forms. In other words, these private colleges may enroll students directly up to certain allotted number, following the enrollment procedures laid down by the State government. Thus, a privately managed engineering college presents a heterogeneity which gets reflected also in the competence of English skills each student brings with him or her.

There is a general impression that many of the students who secure admission through the Management Quota (MQ) come from well-to-do families possibly with a good

background in English medium instruction through Residential/International school education. Students who join the privately managed engineering colleges through the Government Quota (GQ) usually have good grades in various academic subjects and are considered to be the cream of the crop from the vast majority of students who sat for the enrollment examination. In general, it is the general impression that, with a few exceptions, the students who come through MQ already possess a good command over English and perhaps lag behind in their knowledge of competence in academic subjects, whereas the students who are enrolled through the government quota (GQ) lag behind in their competence in English.

### **Landing a Lucrative Job**

While the knowledge and skill in engineering subjects is very important to get a lucrative job, campus recruiters seem to prefer those students who excel both in the engineering subjects and their ability to communicate effectively in English. Workplace environment demands effective communication, and as more jobs these days are done through teamwork, ability to communicate effectively through a common language among a multilingual workforce becomes very significant. Sometimes, inability to communicate effectively is also wrongly taken to mean that the person who is not able to communicate lacks knowledge of the subject matter he or she is trying to communicate. A supervisor is more comfortable with a co-worker who could understand him or her with least effort. If a material is to be repeated several times to ensure comprehension, then precious company time may be wasted!

### **An Empirical Study On The Pace Of Learning Of The MQ And GQ Students**

The situation that prevails in the engineering colleges of Tamilnadu requires some creativity on the part of every English Language teacher to seek, to design and to provide for a variety of materials that would take care of the inherent heterogeneity as explained above. To quote Reimer, "Rarely is it possible to use a particular textbook without the need for supplementary material, and sometimes no really suitable published materials exist for certain learners' needs. The role of ESP teachers, thus, involves choosing suitable published materials from a variety of reliable and valid sources, adapting materials when published ones are not suitable, and even writing new materials if nothing suitable exists" (p. 93).

In order to choose and/or design appropriate materials, we need some empirical data on the quality of language skills of students enrolled in the privately managed engineering colleges. This paper aims at providing some initial data and analysis in that direction.

### **A Summary of the Study Undertaken**

Tests were administered to identify the most relevant and effective methodology to help master the desired levels in English competence.

Three tests were administered to five different groups of students, three of which consisted only of MQ students, whereas the other two consisted only of GQ students. The student groups were formed based on the majors students were pursuing for their B.E. degrees. Generally speaking, students pursuing related majors were put together form separate groups.

The first test was on Listening and Typing; the second test was on Listening for Comprehension and Answering Appropriately; the third test was on Listening for Comprehension and Summarizing.

I propose to present the statistical data as well as the elaborate analysis of results in my next paper. Here below are presented some of the tentative conclusions that I could arrive at based on the current state of my research

## **Conclusion**

The analysis seems to indicate that the Government Quota (GQ) students find it very difficult to present their answers to exam questions due to their inadequate English language skills in comparison to the Management Quota (MQ) students. However, although the MQ students of all the branches were proficient in English, their performance in the subject/s of the examination was not comparably higher. They were, however, very successful in team activities mainly because they successfully comprehended the ideas of the GQ students. It is important to investigate this aspect for many reasons. For example, the sentence construction of GQ students in English is very faulty, and this should have resulted in confusion and difficulty with correctly comprehending the intent of these sentences. It is possible that the MQ students could have subconsciously taken the help of their knowledge of the local Indian language in interpreting the sentence order, etc. of the GQ students. MQ students went after comprehension not after correcting the English expressions of GQ students.

Both the categories of students (MQ and GQ students) committed errors in writing. It appears that their errors may fall under distinct classes – one class of errors predominantly occurring in the writing of MQ students and another and distinct class of errors in the other category, GQ, of students.

Generally, the listening skills of the MQ students proved to be far better than the level in GQ students, as the former, among other things, showed a preference to view English speaking movies in addition to watching movies from other languages. Most of the students who came through MQ enjoyed the listening and writing exercises. Moreover, the writing speed of MQ was much faster.

Most MQ students seem to have studied for long periods in convent-type schools where emphasis on English speaking and writing is much higher. Economic ability of their families has enabled them to receive schooling through such schools. On the other hand, it appears that at least 75% of the GQ students seem to be coming from ordinary English medium schools where English is not prioritized when compared to other subjects. In

fact, the teachers who teach subjects other than English in such schools usually share their subject knowledge not necessarily only through English. As comprehension of content and better performance in exams become their major goal, they also take advantage of the students' facility in the local language to describe, explain and analyze the content. They become result-oriented taskmasters. Hence, they may prefer to teach their subject using the vernacular in addition to English. This probably is an important reason why GQ students who do very well in their subject content found it difficult to express their ideas in English.

Some carefully and creatively designed bridge courses that may be run throughout the course may help remedy the situation so that there will be an impressive harmony between the mastery of subject content and the mastery of expressive skills in English.

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### REFERENCE

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