Strategies for Developing Speaking Skills of Technical Students in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Today, English is the most widely studied foreign language, the world over, after the globalization. English language learning and teaching in Engineering institutions in Tamil Nadu has become a medium of instruction. Most of the entrants of engineering education are second language learners, who were taught English language as a subject, not as a skill at primary and secondary levels. They are unable to cope with the burden of technical subjects especially at the entry level, due to the medium of instruction and method of teaching and learning. The syllabus and the text books prescribed by Anna University for the engineering students aim at developing language skills still the students have not developed spoken skills. Due to that, now-a-days, there is a wide gap among the learners in the acquisition of spoken skills of the language both in general and technical contexts. This condition of the learners prevents them from employability. On the other hand, the language teacher is also professionally liable for the learner's communicative constraints especially spoken skills. It is a challenge for English language teacher to teach heterogeneous group of learners in abnormal ratio. This paper analyses the gap between the practical language skills needed and the reality of students of technical institutes.

Introduction:

There is a wide gap between employability and unemployability of engineers and technocrats, due to their communicative constraints especially spoken skills. Engineers with communicative skills may enhance their career in any industrial milieu while engineers without communicative skills may become unemployable. To bridge this gap, there is a need for improving their spoken skills which were not accorded due importance at tertiary level.

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Researches on the LSRW skills are increasing, however a research on user-friendly, flexible, pragmatic approaches, strategies and techniques for developing speaking skills of the second language learners of Engineering education in Tamil Nadu was not done so far as revealed by the review of related researches. This paper explains a few methods of speaking skills development for Engineering students.

Speaking Skill

Speaking is an act of making sounds and expressing our ideas, thoughts and feelings. To speak often implies conveying information or intended message. Speaking skills in addition help to guarantee that one will not be misunderstood by the listener. Technical institute students are benefitted by the gift of using language lab for developing communication skills.

Types of Speaking Skills:
1. Speaking to Inform something to someone- informative, argumentative speech
2. Speaking to Persuade, Motivate, or Take Action (persuasive, argumentative, controversial, policy speeches) or oratorical skills.
3. Speaking to Entertain a listener (funny, special occasion speeches)

The Barriers for Developing Speaking Skills:
1. Insufficient Vocabulary
2. Medium of Education (Regional Medium or L1 Interference)
3. Lack or inadequate exposure to practice the language skills.
4. Social Barriers like domestic environment and cultural barriers

The first barrier is created by the lack of reading habit. Before the invention of computer and internet print media ruled the world for information gathering and sharing of news. After the advent of computer and internet, the reading skills of the L2 learners have come down to a maximum level. The print media has been converted into online reading (Using Mobile phone or Desktop Computer for reading). This has attracted less number of readers. Thus, reading has been brought as an information gathering or sharing and not as a skill as also reading for pleasure and profit. Hence an L2 learner knows not a spectrum of vocabulary instead he/she lingers on media donated vocabularies which are very less in number(s).

A common and much addressed problem is the interference of L1 in language classroom. This has been a perennial problem that persists even after using several sophisticated methodologies or approaches in second language classrooms. As quoted earlier, at tertiary level, a teacher suffers a lot to cater to the needs of heterogeneous students, which mars the very objective of L2 classrooms. Because of this students from English medium of education excel in learning English while the students Tamil medium lag behind.

At school level the L2 learners are less trained in learning language skills (LSRW). Preparing a learner only for his/her final examination is the basic objective of school education now. Reformatory measures taken by the governments to mend this menace do help a little. When

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the same learner enters higher education arena he/she is crippled with L2 learning despite the fact that he is to enter the job market where he / she fails to sell his employability for want of language skill particularly spoken English.

The fourth problem is the domestic environment and social or cultural barriers. A learner from socially weak or economically poor finds it difficult to spend for buying books and even books available online cost much for him/her. Coming from a weaker environment most of the L2 learners do not know or know less about the use of computers. Now the situation is changing or improving slowly as the governments have taken remedial measures to bridge this gap by giving free laptops to school students.

Methods for Developing Speaking Skills
Group Communication

Any modern method of organization depends on team work and group discussion collectively business enterprises. Governmental and educational institutions depend on two factors:

1. Open organizational concept/climate
2. Participative Management

An interaction and contribution of ideas really help growth. There are teams to help the organizations. Teams are process based. Groups are function based. The objective of the team is preset. The purpose of a group is, "discussion for long term goals". The purposes include:

a. Sharing/Exchanging Information and Ideas
b. Collecting information on Project/Policy/Scheme
c. Decision making
d. Solving organizational problems
e. Further Research

Group Communication involves, meetings, seminars, Group Discussions, symposium, conference, panel discussion, conclave and convention. These factors require soft skills /oral communication skills.

Group Discussion

The group consists of a few. The discussion is for exchange of ideas; to reach a decisive end for any problem. It is for decision making/problem solving. It is for personality test also. This helps evaluation of many. Group Discussion was first started by the defence forces. This precedes interview and selection procedure. Group Discussion has two categories:

a. Organizational Group discussion

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b. Group Discussion as part of Selection process

Organizational Group discussion

It is for decision making by the group. Ideas are explained. Consensus is arrived at. Problems in Traditional interactive group become less. Group think technique should be minimal. There are three techniques:

a. Brain storming
b. Nominal Group Technique
c. Delphi Technique

Brain Storming

This method is for generating ideas and perspectives. In a group of six to twelve people, the leader explains the problem for clear understanding. Alternatives, suggested, are exposed in a board, paper or flip chart. These ideas are for later discussion. There are two types:

1. Story Boarding
2. Lotus Blossom

Major issues are identified in Story Boarding. This is for solving complex problems. The core thought presented takes eight ways. This takes ways and further expansion takes place: consequently, decision making becomes easy.

Nominal Group Technique:

This restricts discussion or interpersonal communication in decision-making process. Being physically present, the group members operate independently. Once the problem is exposed –

1. Members write their ideas of the problems independently
2. The members present their ideas
3. The ideas are discussed for clarity and evaluation
4. After ranking, the decision is made

Delphi Technique

This Delphi Technique is complex, time-bound. This may be an alternative in group decision making. It needs no physical presence of the group members. There are few steps:

1. There is a questionnaire. Identifying the problem, the   members provide the answer.
2. Anonymity and Independent – these help each member to answer.

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3. The results are available by compilation, transcription and re-production copies are given to members
4. New solutions solicited bring changes
5. Consensus is reached.
6. Delphi Technique is the best for two reasons. It is the best. The members do not know each other.

Group Discussion as part of a Selection Process

Group Discussion, for Job or Admission is a device for judging the candidates' personality, communication skills, knowledge and ability for team work.

Characteristics

A topic is given to a group of 8 to 10. The time is limited - 30 minutes. The group sits in a circle or LI shaped pattern. The discussion is observed by the selection panel directly or unobserved. The purpose is to check the team playing skills behaviour, leadership qualities needed for successful profession.

In addition to group communication making the learner to learn not less than ten new words or vocabulary will strengthen their language use. These two methods will definitely improve the communicative ability of any learner when he/she is put under strict environment to practice.

Conclusion

Teaching speaking is a crucial part of second language learning. The ability to converse in a second language clearly and efficiently indicates the success of the learner in school and success later in every sphere of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers should pay greater attention to teaching speaking skills development. Rather than leading or teaching students in memorizing, providing a rich and cosy environment where meaningful communication takes place is desirable. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life and employment. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful for them.

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