

Second Language Learning: A Case-Study of Engineering Students

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of students' area of schooling on their learning of English as a second language through the teaching of Technical Communication. The students selected for the study are from two leading Engineering colleges of Abdul Kalam Technical University—School of Management Science Engineering College and Bansal Institute of Engineering & Technology College, Lucknow. The rationale behind the selection of the sample is that the students in these colleges belong to heterogeneous backgrounds—some hail from urban area while the other from rural backgrounds. The study measures their expectations of the learning of four basic language skills—reading, writing, listening and speaking (LSRW) and to what extent the course contributes. Various findings indicate that the rural students have to be particularly attended with care and motivation to bring them to the forefront so that they may have sound communication skills, while urban students have already sound in speaking instead of writing skills. The researcher has distributed 110 questionnaires personally to the student of each college; the students honestly returned the 100%. And the information was analyzed on the basis of SPSS method. The objectives of the research are to be aware of the students towards international scope of English.

Keywords: L2 Learners, ESP, Rural vs. Urban students LSRW skills, ELT, employability skills

1.0 Introduction

In the present age of globalization and rapid advancement of science and technology the demands and proportion of business, trade, commerce and profession has change drastically. It is not enough to manage at the local level alone. Now, one has to have capabilities to deliver at bigger and more complex and diverse levels. There is a need to develop a code of communication to meet these demands. As a consequence, the importance of English language has been established all the more firmly as has been shown, more than once. According to report CNN-IBN in August 2009, 87% people feel that the knowledge of English is important to succeed in life. The knowledge of English is considered to be a 'passport' to success in professional life. But this has also thrown new challenges to the learners the nature and suitability of the language is different for people different with profession and circumstances. The nature and discipline of work determines the kind of variety of English language one has to master.

There have been significant developments in English teaching all over the world to cater the new demands of the professionals. ESP (English for specific purpose) is one of such kinds which “is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” (Hutchinson, 1987, 19). English for specific purposes is that area of English language teaching which focuses on preparing learners "for chosen communicative environments" (Mohan, 1986, 15). It differs from general English in that it is based on a close analysis of the learner's communicative needs for a specific occupation or activity, as well as a detailed analysis of the language of that occupation or activity (Stevens, 1980).

Unlike in general English courses, in an ESP course, English is taught "for a clearly utilitarian purpose of which there is no doubt" (Mackay, quoted in Robinson, 1980, 6), and it is taught "not as an end in itself but as an essential means to a clearly definable goal" (Mackay, 1978, 28). In other words, the language in an ESP course is not the subject matter but is being learned as part of the process of acquiring some quite different body of knowledge or set of skills (Robinson, 1980). The element that gives ESP its "identity as a distinctive area of language teaching activity is learner's purpose," a purpose that is "not restricted to linguistic competence alone but that does involve the mastery of language skills in which language forms an integral part" (Phillips, 1981, 92). Such specific courses have designed and implemented all the technical institutions all over to cater to the specific needs of the learners. Thus, a course in technical/professional communication has been made integral to the Bachelor of Technology programs throughout the country.

India is a multi-lingual, multiethnic, and multi-religious nation with tremendous variety of tribes, culture, geographies, languages, classes, customs, practices and elevations with the knowledge, exposure and needs widely differing in individual circumstances. The study aims to measure students’ capacity to learn English as a second language which is widely affected by their social, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

2.0 Objective

The objectives of the paper are:

- To analyze how the schooling of the learners impacts their technical communication.
- To assist the students of the needs of improve their Basics four skills Reading, writing, Listening and speaking.

3.0 Methodology

To collect the data a questionnaire was prepared by the researcher and was administered on both male and female students, doing B-tech course (Technical Communication) at and School of Management Science Engineering College, Lucknow and Bansal Institute of Engineering & Technology, Lucknow. To make the study comprehensive the data was collected from the students of varied courses having different dialectical and regional background. The concerned authorities were approached, and permission was sought to collect data. The 220 questionnaires were distributed personally to the students during working hours. Out of 220 questionnaires,

220 completely filled questionnaires were returned with the return rate of almost 100 % students.

4.0 Result and Discussion

The paper assesses the impact of students schooling on their needs and expectations of Technical Communication which is a part of second language learning is taught to the B. Tech first year students of Gautam Buddha technical university Lucknow. The findings have been presented in the form of tables and their possible interpretations have been given in the form of results and its discussion. Of all the factors one's training and schooling impact his language abilities the most. Someone coming of a convent school and a big city has better access and exposure to English language and accordingly his needs are different than the needs of someone who comes of village and a traditional school. Further it may not be justified to make any kind of sweeping generalization. The following tables make a detailed analysis of the findings based on data collected from the School of Management Science Engineering College and Bansal Institute of Engineering College.

Table-1: The Need for Reading Ability

			Reading		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to which students have completed Their intermediate	Rural Area	Number of students	25	1	26
		% within Rural area	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of students	162	22	184
		% within UA	88.0%	12.0%	100.0%
Total		Number of students	187	23	210
		% within Area	89.0%	11.0%	100.0%

Table -2: Improvement in Reading Ability

			Reading		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to which students have completed Their	Rural Area	Number of Students	22	4	26
		% within Rural Area	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of Students	157	27	184
		% within Urban Area	85.3%	14.7%	100.0%

intermediate				
Total	Number of Students	179	31	210
	% within Area	85.2%	14.8%	100.0%

The above tables project the expectations of the students, from both rural and urban areas, regarding need and improvement in their reading ability. Out of 26 students who have done their intermediate from rural area, 96.2% reported they do not need to improve their reading ability through technical communication course. Similarly, out of 184 students who have completed their intermediate from urban area 162 reported that they do not need to improve the reading ability through this course. It is evident from table-3 that there is a high percentage of students (89%), in the sample; who do not demand improvement in reading ability. Thus, there is no statistically significant difference in need for improving reading ability through technical communication course between students from rural and urban areas. So far as improvement of the reading ability is concerned, 15.4% out of 26 rural students say yes to it while 14.7% out of 184 urban students concede that they have improved their reading abilities through technical communication course. There is no significant difference between urban and rural students regarding their improvement of reading skills. The data received may be an indicator of students' indifference to or ignorance of the significance of reading skills in both the areas. As such the course in its present form seems to be able to satisfy students' needs but needs to emphasize more on reading skills to develop students' creative faculty, writing style and critical thinking.

Table-3: The Need for Writing Ability

			Writing		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to which students have completed their intermediate	Rural Area	Number of Students	16	10	26
		% within Rural Area	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of Students	142	42	184
		% within Urban Area	77.2%	22.8%	100.0%
Total		Number of Students	158	52	210
		% within Area	75.2%	24.8%	100.0%

			Writing		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to which students have completed their intermediate	Rural Area	Number of Students	15	11	26
		% within Rural Area	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of Students	117	67	184
		% within Urban Area	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%
Total		Number of Students	132	78	210
		% within Area	62.9%	37.1%	100.0%

Table -4: Improvement in Writing Ability

The questionnaire tried to assess and identify the need to improve writing skills in the students of different areas and how is it impacted by their area of schooling. Out of the total 26 respondents having schooling in the rural area 10 (38.5%) said yes to the need of improving writing skills whereas 16 (61.5%) said no to that whereas out of 184 respondents having schooling in urban area only 42 (22.8%) said yes while 142 (77.2%) said no to writing skills. Thus, the percentage of students requiring improvement in writing skills is comparatively higher among the students of rural area. While judging students' improvement in writing skills through technical communication course, the actual improvement was 42.3% and 36.4% respectively among the rural and urban students. This indicates that the course in its present form caters to the writing need of students.

Table-5: The Students' Need for Listening Ability

			Listening		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to which students have completed Their intermediate	Rural Area	Number of Students	24	2	26
		% within Rural Area	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of Students	141	43	184
		% within Urban Area	76.6%	23.4%	100.0%
Total		Number of Students	165	45	210
		% within Area	78.6%	21.4%	100.0%

Table -6: Improvement in Listening Ability

			Listening		Total
			No	Yes	
Area to Which	Rural Area	Number of Students	18	8	26
		% within Rural Area	69.2%	30.8%	100.0%

students have completed Their intermediate	Urban Area	Number of Students	116	68	184
		% within Urban Area	63.0%	37.0%	100.0%
Total		Number of Students	134	76	210
		% within Area	63.8%	36.2%	100.0%

The assessment of the need to improve the listening skills among the students who have done their schooling from rural or urban and the impact of area of schooling on that showed that only 2 (7.7%) out of 26 students from rural area said yes to listening skills whereas 43 (23.4%) out of 184 said yes to it from the urban area. That means urban students want to improve their listening more than the rural students. This is due to the lack of awareness among rural students regarding listening ability.

While finding the improvement in students' Listening ability, 30.8% out of total 26 students say that they have improved their listening skills through course and 37% out of total 184 urban students say that they have improved their listening ability. Here, once again, some improvements are required to improve students' listening abilities. It is also believed that a better awareness needs to be created among the students regarding the need for and significance of listening skills in the professional world.

Table-7: The Need for the Students' Speaking Ability

			Speaking		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to Which students have completed Their intermediate	Rural Area	Number of Students	6	20	26
		% within Rural Area	23.1%	76.9%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of Students	34	150	184
		% within Urban Area	18.5%	81.5%	100.0%
Total		Number of Students	40	170	210
		% within Area	19.0%	81.0%	100.0%

Table -8: Impact of Area on Students' Improvement of Speaking Ability

			Speaking		
			No	Yes	Total
Area to which students have completed Their intermediate	Rural Area	Number of Students	11	15	26
		% within Rural Area	42.3%	57.7%	100.0%
	Urban Area	Number of Students	66	118	184
		% within Urban Area	35.9%	64.1%	100.0%
Total		Number of Students	77	133	210
		% within Area	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%

So far as the need for improvement in speaking is concerned, 20 (76.9%) out of 26 students from rural area said that they need to improve their speaking skills while 150(81.5%) out of 184 students from urban area said they need to improve their speaking skills. Thus, it can be inferred that there is not much difference in the need for speaking skills among rural and urban students. Gauging the actual improvement of speaking ability, it was found that 57.7% out of total 26 students from rural background and 64.1% out of total 184 urban students improved their speaking skills through the course. Thus, there is no significant difference between the urban and rural students regarding their improvement of speaking skills. However, there was a noticeable gap between the expectation and the actual improvement. Thus, it may be inferred that the technical communication course present in the colleges does cater to the students' speaking skills as much as is required.

Conclusion

The study suggests that the student should be categorized on the basis of their rural and urban background. Three stages may be proposed for the rural students—primary, intermediate, and tertiary levels. At the primary level, these students should be made aware of the basics of communication skills and conducive atmosphere in order to generate certain degree of confidence in them. Intermediate level may be used to expose them to language laboratories where they should be encouraged to train themselves with the help of trainers in their accents, pronunciation and intonation along with the advanced level of communication skills. Tertiary level should be the final level where the students should be prepared for and encouraged to make presentation, take seminar and practice group

discussion and interview skills. According to the performance of the students in the English diagnostic test, these students may be introduced to the primary level and then intermediate and tertiary level or they should be taken in directly at intermediate or tertiary level. Identifying these levels of the students would help them to improve their competence in their communication skills step wise.

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