

The Influence of Communication and Culture on Engineering Education in Hyderabad

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Abstract: Communication is an integral part of culture. We cannot separate language from culture. Speaking is a part of verbal communication skills that brings recognition to a person when used effectively. Effective speakers communicate with ease while sending and receiving information. If one can master the art of speaking, nothing is impossible to achieve. Innumerable factors such as socio-cultural background, society, quality of education and so on account to an individual's speaking ability. The paper presents factors that are directly or indirectly responsible for a person's mediocre spoken skills and how our culture has its own share in it, in addition to suggesting some probable solutions.

Index Terms: Communication, Culture, Education, Engineering Students, English Language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture reflects in the way we walk, talk, eat, dress and behave. It shares a lot of information that we need not share verbally. The way a person talks can reflect a lot on his/her place of origin. Culture is defined as the shared pattern of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group [1].

A. How culture interlaces with communication?

Some of us have aped the west in innumerable ways by following their food trends when we crave for burgers, pizzas etc. We readily accept their way of clothing by comfortably wearing jeans, t-shirts and so on. We even follow their weekend policy, but often do not want to speak in English or help in polishing their language. We try and stick on to our language for reasons unknown. We do not want to give a picture of our culture dying, or try to keep our culture alive. We feel very happy to speak in our mother tongue, to sing folklore or hear someone speak our mother tongue when we are abroad. Language definitely binds our culture and has been an integral part of our culture, making pride ingrained in our culture. It has been seen that language is much more than the external expression and communication of internal thoughts formulated independently of their verbalization. In demonstrating the inadequacy and inappropriateness of such a view of language, attention has already been drawn to the ways in which one's native language is intimately and in all sorts of details related to the rest of one's life in a community and to smaller groups within that community. This is true of all peoples and all languages; it is a universal fact about language [2].

Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.

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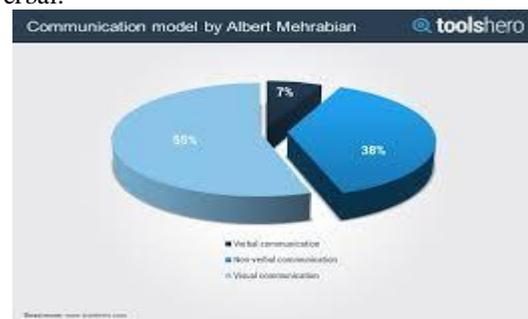
Most of the westerners speak in English because it is their first language and hence their language or idiolect is unmatched to ours. For Indians, English is a second language and hence it should be given more emphasis along with our First Language nevertheless it becomes a hurdle during interviews or a hindrance to our career.

II. MAJOR WORK

A. Communication

“Communication is the intercourse by words, letters or messages”- Fred G. Meyer.

The term communication means to express our feelings or emotions to another person or a group. Communication plays a pivotal role as it gives us identity and recognition whenever we communicate. All the four skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking are involved when we communicate. Communication is broadly of two types- Verbal and Nonverbal.



We can communicate verbally to an individual, to a small or a large group based on the situation and need. When we communicate verbally many aspects determine our effective communication; audibility of our voice, tone, pitch, intonation, pacing, syntax, voice modulation and so on.

Nonverbal communication involves body language, gestures, posture, eye contact, facial expressions, touch and so on. Both verbal and nonverbal communications are equally important for communication. In 1971, Albert Mehrabian published a book Silent Messages, in which he discussed his research on non-verbal communication.



He concluded that prospects based their assessments of credibility on factors other than the words the salesperson spoke—the prospects studied assigned 55 percent of their weight to the speaker's body language and another 38 percent to the tone and music of their voice. [3]

When we refer to verbal communication, speaking holds its own importance. Nonverbal communication is not a number game. Speaking is one of the four Communication skills which gives individuality to a person when used effectively. Effective speakers communicate with ease while sending and receiving information. IMPOSSIBLE says I'M POSSIBLE. If one can master the art of speaking, nothing is impossible to achieve.

English is considered as the Global Language. It is often used in day to day communication at offices and for other basic communications. It is used as a medium of instruction in Educational Institutions. It is also used in deciding a candidate's future when their spoken skills are tested during interviews. Over 80% of Indian engineering graduates are "Unemployable" [4]. Most of the technical companies are no longer willing to spend time and money in applicants who do not speak today's lingua franca. Gone are the days when companies were ready to spend time and money in honing the skills of selected candidates. The trend has changed completely today; they are looking for finished products. In short, they are only willing to recruit a person whose skills are on par with the cream of the crop.

Skills like Coding, etc. can be learnt over a period of time, but speaking skills cannot be mastered in a short span. With this growing importance being given to the English language, many students are unable to survive the market. As all the four communication skills are interconnected, possession of one is not possible without the other. It is improbable for one to be able to read well, while being incapable to speak well, or having adequate speaking skills but being unable to write well and so on. A person with good speaking skills will be able to convince even his enemy. In short, he/she can survive. Hence English speaking is undoubtedly the most important skill a person should possess.

Speaking skill is associated with various sub skills like pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, pitch, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary building, sentence structures, discourse markers, coherence and word stress which make a lot of difference in a person's spoken skill set.

B. Why do Engineering students have poor spoken skills?

Students enter engineering colleges with carefree fun and frolic and complete their course, clearing their backlogs from time to time. After a great deal of struggle, they successfully earn the Engineering degree and are on the lookout for jobs. Of the 15 lakh engineering graduates India produces every year, 20-30% of them do not find jobs, and many others work jobs which well below their technical qualification. And yet more are compelled to take up jobs which have nothing to do with their education or engineering [5].

A small number gets lucky to be campus placed while the rest are between the Devil and the Deep sea: Unable to decide either to take up a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) job with a meager pay (which offers them peanuts) or to join a Soft Skills Course or a Campus Recruitment Training (CRT) program in order to become employable. Under such harsh circumstances, the students are forced to take up a job which is of least interest to them or try to pursue higher studies abroad. The situation is not very rosy here as well, because

they land up studying at a place that offers them the least prospects of growth or sometimes results in stagnation. An Engineering graduate cannot just take their degree and stay back home as there will be a lot of peer and parent pressure, and most importantly pressure from the acquaintances. To avoid this, the poor student is left with no choice but to take up an alternative of either going abroad or taking jobs as a formality. This job also does not land up in their lap easily.

References often help a great deal under such circumstances. So, finally by hook or crook, they land up with an offer letter in hand after much perusal. As the adage goes, 'Success has many fathers, failure has none'. No one is ready to bell the cat when it comes to taking responsibility for not being able to produce successful engineers in our country. Parents aim very high for their wards as they do not want their children to face the agony they had once faced. They even fall into debt in order to provide good education for their children. They enroll them in English Medium Schools hoping that they would benefit from it. They eagerly crave listening to their children speaking in English as a life's pursuit. Their excitement soon results in disappointment as schools focus mostly on core subjects or fetching subjects and often neglect the English subject.

The medium of instruction which is supposed to be English is often confined to papers alone as most of the teachers resort to teaching in their mother tongue in order to explain the concepts to the students. They often pronounce words not in a way they are supposed to be pronounced, but in a way they feel should be pronounced or a way they were taught to be pronounced. Teachers have a tremendous impact on the young minds. Children tend to resist even when corrected at home because of the faith they have in their teachers. Scoring subjects like Mathematics and Science are given importance over other subjects because ultimately result is what matters. Schools need students to pass with flying colors which can be used for advertising for the school. Students converse in their mother tongue throughout the day and expect wonders when the time is ripe. They write in English often neglecting the grammar in it, which is also neglected by the evaluators who feel that the concept is understood by the child and he has produced it on the paper. The student grows up with the same confidence feeling that only understanding the concept is important and not presenting it.

Students who take up coaching classes or tuitions often sign up for the core subjects and not for English. Even at these learning centers, the medium of instruction is either the teacher's mother tongue or the student's. A library is a treasure trove of knowledge which barely enlightens the young minds but it is treated as just another room in the school. Most of the schools have a library but students have no access to it. The list has thousands of books on the paper and countable in reality. The library is only used to be shown during inspection or when a teacher is on leave. Students grow up missing out a lot of knowledge. They are also ignorant of books and their authors which not only serve to hone their skills and vocabulary but also their General Knowledge. If this is the status of education in towns and cities, one can estimate the quality in rural areas. After schooling, comes Intermediate experience which is gorier. The stream decides it all.



Nine to ten hours of incessant studies in Corporate Colleges followed by study hours take a massive toll on the students. English classes are conducted once or twice a week just to complete the syllabus at hand. Similar to schools, the medium of instruction is often the mother tongue of the teacher. Students hardly find time to speak, leave alone gossip – which is done in their mother tongue accordingly. Very rarely do we find students failing in English subject because the teachers show a lot of generosity. They never fail a child in language hoping not to ruin their career. At times there will be no connection between the marks the students secure and their spoken skills.

After years of struggle they finally end up in an Engineering College hoping to make their dreams come true. These dreams are unfortunately soiled owing to poor or no quality in the education and lack of communication skills. The language labs are used only for formality sake or during inspection. Hiring of English faculty when compared to other Engineering subjects is not based on quality as English is not considered an important subject. In the third or fourth year CRT Program or Soft Skills Training Program for a month's or fortnight's duration is introduced to bring overnight changes and to improve employability skills in the students. The students face tough time coping up with the training program as the pressure of the exams mounts right above their heads. Very few students give importance to these programs while the others want to live momentarily and focus on the exams and backlogs at hand. So there is no time for engineering students to focus on Language skills.

Students who migrate from rural areas face an uphill climb. They are new to the place; they need to cope up with a new subject, get used to the new environment, make new friends, get used to the local cuisine, and most importantly understand the lectures if delivered exclusively in English. English thus becomes an alien language for these students who often sit aloof and remain cut off from the rest. With so many new challenges at hand, learning English appears to be very trivial to be focused on. History tells us that any new thing, whether language or art can be mastered only through practice. The same applies to English fluency as well.

The first and foremost reason is that Students study in English Medium schools and colleges but they never speak in English. The term ENGLISH MEDIUM sounds so mellifluous that they feel themselves to be on cloud 9. Other than that, English is barely used in their day to day conversations. The reason to use English is never felt as they are able to manage with their regional language. Even if a few students do try speaking in English in order to improve, they are mocked at by their peers, who would ultimately result in them shying away or giving up.

They get an opportunity to interact with English language only during the English period. The lectures are delivered in the English Language while the student just listens to the lectures but practical application of the language is nil. Neither schools nor colleges give importance to English, so the effect of English fades off and the students do not take this subject seriously. In the evening after returning home most of them tend to watch Television programs in their regional language.

Newspapers are also read in regional languages. Basic conversations at home, amongst friends and relatives also take place in mother tongue only. So, the need to use English never does arrive. This is the main reason when students face a problem introducing themselves during interviews or

expressing their ideas during JAM sessions / EXTEMPORE and while making presentations. They mumble and fumble during the interviews resulting in easy elimination, despite having outstanding percentages. Some companies like AMAZON conduct an online English Test called the Pearson Versant Test. This test is cleared only by a student who is good with their communication skills. Every company has also got a 'freezing period' during which a second attempt to face the interview is strictly restricted. The student has to wait for three to six months if he/she wants to secure a job in that particular company. Then they enroll in Spoken English courses/ Soft Skills training program or CRT Sessions hoping for the best. Here also, a lot of time and money is wasted.

If securing a job is not possible, the next immediate option left is to go abroad for further studies. To complete this process, they have to clear GRE + TOEFL if they want to pursue MS , GMAT + TOEFL if they want to pursue MBA and IELTS based on the requirement of the College / University. The terrorising fact is that the English Language is primarily tested in all these exams. Here again, history repeats and the students spend a lot of time and money in enrolling and trying to clear these exams. Some students, who work hard, achieve success while the others are back to ground zero. Having failed in all their endeavors, some resort to setting up their own businesses by raising loans. Life is not all that rosy here as well. All business persons aim for good deals and to get them, one needs good communication skills. Unable to face this problem some hire personal secretaries while some just compromise with whatever is available.

III. CONCLUSION

As the adage goes: a rolling stone gathers no moss, it would be wise if we start speaking in English in our day to day conversations unless we are sure the person we are conversing with is not in a position to understand us. We can also make a thorough attempt to hone our language skills by reading English Newspapers out loud which cover global news, listening to English music if we have a good ear, watching English movies for entertainment and most importantly thinking in English. By doing so, we don't have to wait for the right time as we would be braced for that uphill climb in our lives.

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