



**Strategies to Solve Students' Common Communicative Problems at Engineering College Level** by V.Rajasekaran

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**Author's Profile**

V.Rajasekaran has been involved in teaching English as a second language, Business English, Technical English and English for Special Purpose for more than 7 years. His interests include ELT and applied Linguistics. Besides, he has edited one book and presented 43 research papers in national and international conferences, seminars and workshops. He has been involved in soft skill training for which he has obtained certificates from corporate giant **Infosys Ltd** and **Sutherland Global BPO services** and he is also engaging in motivation training and personal counseling. He holds an MA (English literature), an M.Sc (Psychology), an M.Phil (ELT) and doing PhD in Applied Linguistics. He is working on Vocabulary teaching and learning process for his doctorate. He is currently heading the department of English in EBET Group Institutions. He is a member of English language teachers Association of India, Chennai, International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, UK, Systemic Functional Linguistics Association, Hyderabad and Life Member of Indian Society of Technical Education, New Delhi.



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**Abstract**

Mushrooming of engineering colleges has phenomenally increased English language learners. Every engineering graduate is required a sizable amount of proficiency in English language to make him employable. Globalization have resulted in liberal policies, which is paving way to lot of new institutions, fresh institutions are fundamentally weak in their basic amenities that leads poor outcome of the students. If we take language efficiency of the tertiary level students in these institutions, the language efficiency are very pathetic. IT/IT enabled industries have created large pool of employment opportunities and their crux issue is English language proficiency. All the students are in the state of compulsion of learning English language where as most of our students are not at all taking any steps to improve their language. The English teachers are simply playing blame game on their school teachers and vice a versa. Though our students have studied English for twelve years in their school, they miserably fail even in the basics. Who should take responsibility for this? Whether is it teachers, students, parents or society? NASSCOM report says that only one third of the present pass out students are employable, remaining students are unemployable due to lack of English knowledge.

This paper explores the stumbling blocks of language learning and how that blocks can be removed with reference to engineering students.



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**Current Scenario of English Language Teaching in Engineering Institutions**

Technical universities are having English as one of the basic subjects in their first year but students are not giving much importance to English in engineering colleges due to simple syllabus. The students consider English as one of the subjects; he wants to get a pass in the exam and not at all bothered about real learning. Almost everyone realizes the importance of English only, when they knock the door of employment. At this juncture, developing one's language is a very tough task. Who is responsible for this situation? Absolutely, students themselves are responsible. Given opportunities are denied and no steps are taken to develop their language during their studies. Engineering syllabi are also not that much effective in some universities. Now days, some reformations have been carried out in framing new syllabi. Two years back, Anna University, Chennai has introduced a new paper called Communication Skills Laboratory. It has some practical relevance to the company needs. Teachers of engineering colleges have to be well qualified and they must take initiative to mould the students in their language proficiency. Majority of the teachers are following conventional methodology of teaching; where they are active, students are passive and they are not given much scope to expose their skills except written part. Evaluation part is also not that much appreciable, since current evaluation system only evaluates their memory and presentation skills, not much of language areas. This is being the case, how can we expect our students to have good language skills? In order to find out their real problems, brainstorming sessions have been conducted in various branches of B.E/B.Tech and their view points of students have been taken for research analysis. The next part of this paper explores the students' views on their real problems.

**Common communicative hurdles**

Initially, students are asked to disclose their language learning problems and sufficient time is given to think over on it. The next day, the brainstorming sessions are conducted where the students have listed problems. The most important problems are

- **Negative Criticism**
- **Lack of Interest**
- **Fear & Shyness**



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- **Inhibition**
- **Poor practice**
- **Inadequate word power**

**Negative criticism**

Students feel that negative criticism is the main stigma for their language practice and prevents them from talking in English. They have registered their interest in using English if everyone speaks in English. As a result of this, they are branded as “**different guys**”. Naturally, the stigma gets aggravated. So automatically they are coming back to pavilion.

**Lack of Interest**

“How many of you are speaking in English in and outside of the classroom?” This is the question posed to three different branches of heterogeneous group of engineering students and findings were astonishing! Only 2% of the students are talking in English. Further, the same students were brainstormed and was found even the English medium students are not able to speak in English. Their main reason is that they are comfortable with their ‘Mother Tongue’. Some of them said that they do not have interest to speak in English. Where as, most of them blame the environment which is not conducive for speaking in English.

**Fear, Shyness & Inhibition**

Students evinced their psychological problems in language especially, in front of large audience. Fear and shyness are the main defacements. The surprising note is that these students are basically, strong in their subject in certain extent, but due to these defacements, they are unable to come out of their cocoons.

**Poor Practice**

It is absolute fact that practice is very much lacking. They attribute their own reasons for their problems. Very few students are only taking practices in speaking English and finally they succeed in their attempts.



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**Inadequate Word Power**

Words are the building blocks of communication which is the first step of any language learning. Our students are so weak in due to lack of reading habits. The advent of internet made our work very easy but it has highly reduced the reading habits. Owing to vernacular medium and some other factors, students are even unaware of basic vocabulary.

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**Motivation with the Help of Mother Tongue**

Initially students are motivated by giving detailed skeleton about their L1 learning processes and methods. They are made aware about their initial learning process in their L1 and acquisition of words and pronunciation. At this stage they are completely clarified with their first language learning processes and finally they are made to understand that same method can be adopted for L2 learning.

**English Speaking Circle (ESC)**

With comparison of L1, students' basic problem, are identified that, their chances to learn and use English language are very limited. In order to solve this issue, they are directed to form '**English Speaking Circle**' comprising of their own close friends in the classroom. They are asked to speak only in English in their **ESC** with known English. They are advised not to bother about errors, but they should keep on talking only in English. It provides platform for the students to employ their known English whereas earlier they have not got any chance to speak like this because they are worried about their errors.

**Step by Step Language Learning (S<sup>2</sup>L<sup>2</sup>)**

Slow learners find it difficult to adopt in **ESC**. They are asked to follow "Step by step language learning process" which means language learning have to start from simple greetings, questions, answers and etc. **S<sup>2</sup>L<sup>2</sup>** made them to feel comfortable in learning English.

**Self Motivation & Auto Suggestion**

Novel strategies will not be successful, unless students are ready to learn them. Though students are motivated initially, their interest level is inconsistent throughout the period. After



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certain period, the interest starts to decrease. To overcome this, self-motivation & auto-suggestion techniques are used to bring them back to square. One hour training program is arranged on self motivation & auto suggestion in English Language learning with senior professors. It helped to regain the students' interest.

**Reading Club**

Students are advised to form reading club in their class. Reading club members are asked to read newspaper regularly. Everyday they should discuss the newspaper news half an hour either in break or leisure periods. Each member has to read a new article every week and a new book every month that have to be discussed in their club. If anything is very interesting, either article or book, they can take 10 minutes time to present in the class.

**Follow-up Activity**

These strategies gave good results. Proper planning and involvement is very important to do exercise these strategies. Impeccable follow up activities are also very crucial to get good results. Gradual improvement and flaws are noticed and informed to the students. It helped them to understand their real growth and flaws. Simple competitions like word game, sentence game are conducted to create healthy competition.

**Students' Response**

Initially, some students feel that these strategies will not help them to improve more but finally, they accepted that they have created tremendous change in their use of English. Mainly, it has elevated their confidence level..

One of my students has opined that he found great improvement in his language level. Commonly, students admit that these strategies really provide L1 language learning environment.

It is found that some students are unable to speak, even though they are from English medium because they are not given much scope to practise English. When they become member of **ESC**, they start to speak naturally.



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### **Findings**

Students of heterogeneous group have shown great improvement in their confidence level and they have shown considerable growth in their language proficiency. They have improved their word power and grammar. Everyone commonly admit that they have equipped themselves with language proficiency. "How many of you are talking in English outside the classroom?" The same question that has been posed to the students in pre-strategic activities is asked to the same sample in the post-strategic scenario. It was found that nearly 60% of the students have improved from just 2%. In another sample, the improvement was found moved ahead to 62% from 2%. This figure edifies these strategies as the finest examples of success in acquiring English Language proficiency.

### **Limitations & Future Scope of This Study**

Though this study has given positive results, it has its own limitations. As mentioned earlier this experimental study has been conducted only in two classes of rural based self financing engineering institution.

This study can be taken to higher level comparing students of different colleges. Urban institutions alone can be taken for the experiment.

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