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Significance of English Language Communication Laboratory for Professional Students & the Effective Role of a Language Teacher

Bishnu Prasad Gogoi

Assistant Professor, Department of English
The Assam Kaziranga University, Jorhat, Assam

Abstract:

With technology bringing us closer and English becoming a global language, proficiency in English is considered essential for a person's personal and professional growth. Today, it is effective communication in English that fetches students their dream jobs; helps a professional surge ahead of others; keeps afloat a multi-national organization; elevates a common mortal to the dizzy heights of achievements; and in a way, defines and redefines our existence in this competitive world. Thus, it is expected from everyone, especially the professional students to have effective communication skills not just because of decisive breakthroughs in communication technology but also because with each passing day, the impact of the words they say and write seems to grow manifold. In an age of fragile hopes and tenuous human relations, it is how they present themselves verbally and non-verbally that gives them a sense of adequacy and certainty. At the professional front, it is communication and its related skills that decide a person's career curve. It is so because in the professional world, what professionals do most of the time is communicate. The language laboratory plays an important role in the language learning process which focusses on student-centered learning. The main objective of the English laboratory is to prepare the students for campus recruitment and make them to enhance their LSRW skills. The present paper of mine discusses in details the significance of English Communication Laboratory for professional students and also the active role that a language Teacher is expected to play.

Keywords: Technology, Communication Laboratory, Professional students, fragile

1. Introduction

Engineering and Technology graduates require an ever-increasing range of skills to maintain relevance with the global environment of the new millennium. English Communication Skills are a vital tool for this, recognized by academicians and industry. English language skills are also important, given its widespread status across the globe as a *lingua franca*. Indeed, multilingual skills are considered a salient feature in the make-up of the new global engineer. English communication skills are essential for a professional student who aspires to carry out his/ her professional practice in the global arena. Today's engineer has to communicate with more number of his / her counterparts across the globe and has to travel to many continents and work away from their home country. But their language proficiency is not enough for them to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently. The engineers produced by the universities / colleges suffer largely due to lack of communicative skills to study in the world class institutions or work in global atmosphere. To overcome this, "The Assam Kaziranga University has set up a language laboratory on its premises to enable students to develop their communicative skills." The University has introduced, "English Language Communication Lab", which develops student's communication skills. It acts as a platform for learning, practicing and producing language skills through interactive sessions.

2. English Language Communication Laboratory

English Language Communication Laboratory, a compulsory course for engineering and technology students studying in the Assam Kaziranga University, Koraikhowa, Jorhat was introduced in the year 2012. It is offered to all the branches of First and Second semester students. The main objective of the course is to develop students' communication skills and prepare them for placement / campus recruitment.

The Assam Kaziranga University, Jorhat, has designed the English Communication Laboratory Course for engineering and technology students which comprises the four skills of learning – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The subject title is "English Communication Skills", a theory subject and "English Communicative Lab", a practical subject. The laboratory sessions are delivered with the assistance of Networked Computers and specially designed software. The objectives of the laboratory sessions are given below:

- To equip the students of engineering and technology with effective speaking and listening skills.

- To help them develop their soft skills required to enhance their personality, which will make the transition smoother from college to workplace and help them to excel in their jobs.
- To enhance students' performance at Placement Interviews, Group Discussions and other recruitment exercises.

In the laboratory sessions, trainings are enhanced on the four skills of learning-listening, reading, speaking and writing. Vocabulary and speaking tests are conducted at time intervals. The learners are trained on Resume/Report and Professional Letter writing preparation along with training in Presentation Skills, Group Discussions and Interview Skills. Tests and Evaluations are decided by the examiners at the end of the semester.

3. Role of English Language Communication Laboratory

In the Indian context, the success of an engineering or technology student in the "on campus recruitment" process is mainly based on their demonstrations of communication skills. Only a decade before, Universities and Colleges have introduced Skill based courses which focus on communication skills. An English Language Communication Laboratory is a facility where a student can learn a language with the help and guidance of a teacher through a computerised system, to improve his / her speaking and listening capacity. Such Language Laboratory can receive inputs from recorded tapes, audios and videos, CDs, etc. A proficient teacher in the English language is the only external requirement to monitor the students during the learning process. Students will automatically receive pre-recorded lessons from the master source through the teacher while logging in and can use these lessons for practice. Students can be subdivided into small groups to either listen and respond to the expert's programme material or interact with each other in conversational exercises. These laboratories have advanced remote monitoring facility, which enables the teacher to monitor all the students through a master control computerised system.

To investigate the role of English Language Communication Laboratory in elevating learning of English, a survey was conducted among 50 Engineering and Technology students from the Assam Kaziranga University in the district of Jorhat. It is evident from the result that 80% of the professional students were positively inclined towards the use of English Language Communication Laboratory in their curriculum. The reasons for their preference are listed below:

- English Communication Lab enhances their listening skills.
- Lab interactions are enriching and interesting for them.
- They are more attentive in the Lab session than in the Theory class.
- English Communication Lab gives them total freedom to learn at their own pace.
- Their participation in interactive session improves their Spoken English.
- English Communication Lab builds their self-confidence.
- Communication Lab develops their Presentation Skills with Power Point.
- Learning Phonetics and Grammar in Communication Lab is beneficial for them.
- They can practise the Phonetic Sounds of RP in Communication Lab.
- Communication Lab helps them read printed passages with clarity.
- They like to devote their leisure time to do practical work in Communication Lab.
- Communication Lab helps them to acquire comprehension skills after listening to a text.
- Communication Lab improves their communicative proficiency in English.
- Communication Lab trains them to face Interviews, Group Discussions and Public Speaking.
- It also trains them in Soft Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Decision Making, Business Communication and Pre-Placement training.
- The shy and slow learners are greatly benefitted, as they are monitored individually.
- Students with less fluency can improve better in Communication Lab.
- Involvement in pairs and group activities make them speak English with confidence.
- Communication Lab motivates them to read English newspapers and listen to B.B.C and T.V. English news.
- English Language Communication Lab motivates the language teacher to incorporate computer technology in the language teaching.
- Communication Lab is very useful for assessing students' speech. It provides students with the technical tools to get the best samples of pronunciation of the language.
- The electronic devices used in the laboratory stimulates the eyes and ears of the learners to acquire the language quickly and easily.
- The laboratory's collection is designed to assist learners in the acquisition and maintenance of aural comprehension, oral and written proficiency, and cultural awareness.
- To acquire a sensibility for the sounds and rhythm of a language, one has to hear the best samples of a spoken language.

4. Role of an English Language Teacher

- The English teaching faculty members need to be friendly with the students so that they can freely interact and express their problems in learning and improving English language.
- The English language teacher should analyse what necessary steps need to be taken to strengthen communication skills among the students.
- The English language teacher needs to play various roles such as motivator, counsellor, diagnostician and above all, communication and soft skills trainer.

- The Language teacher should encourage his/ her students to overcome fear towards English language by counselling and motivating them.
- The Language teacher should make his/ her students comfortable with the language they have to speak and write.
- The Language teacher should take firm decision that the students interact in English not only in the lab but also around the campus.
- The Language teacher should involve the students in various sessions such as Debates; JAM Sessions; Group Discussions; Role Play; etc. in order to strengthen the confidence level of the students.
- The shy and slow learners must be given special counselling by devoting considerable time in Language Lab.
- The Language teacher must encourage his/ her students to cultivate the habit of reading English newspapers, magazines, fictions, novels, etc. at regular intervals.
- The Language teacher ought to encourage the students to gain command over the essentials of English grammar.
- The Language teacher has to enable his/ her students to learn better correct pronunciation using stress, intonation and rhythm.
- The teacher of English language should motivate his/ her students to take active participation in regional and national seminars, symposiums and workshops and remain updated with the latest knowledge in the specialization of English language and communication skills.
- The teacher of English language should try to improve his/ her students' listening skills by formulating various activity based exercises.
- The Language teacher must employ different innovative methods of teaching English with simple techniques.
- As a teacher of English language, one must have rigorous practice and never loose heart because if he/ she does not get the desired outcome from the students. By using advanced language software, teaching aids and with regular motivation, counselling, the Language teacher will certainly achieve success.
- In addition to all the points, the Language teacher must divide the entire class into small groups and ask them to engage in free talk on any topic which they like most. Such activity will make them to shed their inhibitions towards English language speaking and they may become fluent speakers of English language.

5. Barriers Faced by Students and Teachers

Some barriers faced by the teachers and students in implementing the Communication Laboratory effectively are as follows:

- Setting up of a Communication Laboratory is very expensive.
- Lack of well-equipped lab with listening components.
- Lack of Spoken English environment outside the Language lab.
- Examination oriented teaching.
- Lack of curiosity in learning Phonetics and stress pattern.
- Lack of trained instructors for students in communication lab.
- Lack of technical skills among Language teachers.
- Lack of special training for Language teachers.
- Lack of motivation due to lack of knowledge of software and its operation.
- Lack of good software according to the level of the students.

6. Recommendations

- Mere existence of computers in the communication lab does not lead to learning. The teachers must lay emphasis on guidance rather than learner-control.
- A learning environment is to be created. The communication lab becomes most useful in the hands of a craftsman who knows how to use it skilfully. For this purpose there must be trained instructor in communication lab so that he/she may motivate and guide the learner in right direction.
- Interesting and goal-oriented software (according to the mental level of the learners) should be installed into computers of communication lab.
- Communication lab should be updated and maintained time to time.
- The English teacher should be competent enough to play different roles such as an English teacher, a communication skills consultant and a soft skills trainer.
- As the English teacher has to converse about technical topics with students while testing their speaking skill, he is expected to be familiar with those matters.
- Use of mother tongue by the English teacher makes it difficult for the students to practice their own English speaking skills. So, the English teacher should develop a classroom environment of interaction in English.
- Lack of willingness and interest among the Language teachers to attend workshops, seminars, symposium, etc. to know the new trends in language teaching should be eliminated.
- English teacher should help the students to cultivate the habit of reading from printed materials and computer monitor, thus providing them with the required facility to face computer –based competitive exams such GRE, TOEFL, GMT etc.
- The management should be aware of English Language Communication Lab's vision and provide well-equipped language labs with required listening components.

- Teachers should be provided opportunities on regular basis to participate in teaching training courses, seminars and workshops.
- The external examination method is not enough to measure one's depth of knowledge because very few examiners are sincere in judging student's English proficiency while conducting university practical exam.

7. Conclusion

Professionals in any organization usually spend 75 percent of their time in communicating through speaking, writing, listening and reading. Effective communication is an essential tool for the success of any organization. A recent newspaper report said that of every hundred interviews, only five qualified for employability. This is not because they lack technical skills but they lack effective communication skills. Communication skills are as important as technical qualifications for professional students aiming at a brighter career. Poor communication skills, low confidence levels and improper body language have bad results in the job race. The command over the English language and accent neutralization plays a vital role in the recruitment process. Hence, it is high time that our traditional teaching methods underwent change. Unless the new technology is adopted in English language teaching, we cannot impart language skills in our learners at the rate of growing competition. English Communication Laboratory is an elevating tool in learning English language skills through technology, in the present generation. The best part is that it is learner-centric rather than teacher-centric. This new learning of language, especially for non-native learners of English as a second language is fast gaining acceptance globally. And the results are quite encouraging. It will be more effective if English Language Communication Laboratory is introduced from the elementary level in our education system.

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