

RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION COURSE CONTENTS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION IN THE STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

In this world of gizmos, Master of Computer Application students are in dire need of enhancing their career opportunities and job prospects, possessing good communication and employability skills to achieve success in campus drives. To meet this demand, Technical Communication course in a three year MCA programme is viewed in a positive perspective in terms of reaching their goals and reducing the unemployment rate among Computer Application graduates.

Against this backdrop, the present study specifically aimed at critically examining the Course Contents of the Technical Communication course for MCA programme in select institutions of Andhra Pradesh. Structured questionnaire has been administered to major stakeholders (i.e. students and faculty) to collect the data which is further analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Making use of the descriptive analysis and frequency distribution method, the results and recommendations are provided to the respective university officials to customize the course contents of Technical Communication course as per the students' and industry needs.

Keywords: *Technical Communication, Grammar and Vocabulary, Course contents, employability skills, Job opportunities, analysis and findings.*

1. Introduction

In this modern world Master of Computer Application has become an instrumental pathway for young Computer Professionals to open the better avenues for successful careers. In the global arena, opportunities in Multi-National Companies, Private or recognized Banks and Media are so rampant so also the demand for this course. Inevitably, the range of candidates for this course is from undergraduate to senior professionals, employed to entrepreneurs, from primary sectors (such as agricultural and mining) to secondary sectors (production and manufacturing) to tertiary sectors (banking). The students who opt and enroll for MCA (Master of Computer Application) are varied demographically in case of age, qualification and experience. This momentum has achieved due to the right fulfillment of course objectives and learners' needs.

In this context, universities are paying a lot of attention in allowing the right platform and opportunities for MBA participants to improve better language skills by introducing Technical Communication course. As part of designed course content they are destined to gain the required oral and written skills along with the Basic English skills like grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, pronunciation besides the concepts of business communication. Such courses which come under the category of ESP are being offered in various universities as a part of MCA programme. The syllabus contents of this course at this level of study are obviously different from the general English syllabus which focuses more on grammatical aspects and literary appreciation and less on acquisition of communication skills.

As the course of Technical Communication is equally challenging and at par with the core subjects prescribed for the students of MCA and as it is also one of the determining factors in

accomplishment of jobs, a thorough evaluation of course components gain manifold significance. Therefore, the present study aims to examine such issues related to Technical Communication course and its implementation in the state universities of Andhra Pradesh.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As part of the critical evaluation of course components, an attempt was made to take a holistic approach at some fields which have relevance to the present research such as Language in India (Indian Education Commission (1964-66); National Knowledge Commission), English Language in India (Indian Universities Commission (1902) etc., English for Specific Purposes (Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987); Richards (2001); Chiu's (1972); Dudley Evans and St John (1998); Allen and Widdowson (1974); Carter (1983) etc., Needs Analysis (Richterich and Chancerel (1977); Munby(1978); Mackay and Bosquet (1981) etc., Curriculum Evaluation (Stern (1983); Taylor (1970); Cunningsworth, (1984); Davies, A. (1984); Scriven (1967); Parlet& Hamilton, 1972)

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To critically evaluate the Technical Communication course contents in selected AICTE recognized universities / institutes which offer post graduate degrees equivalent to MCA in the state of Andhra Pradesh.
2. To conduct a needs analysis of students in the selected institutions /universities to identify needs and deficiencies of the course contents in order to gain a comprehensive perception of the syllabi prescribed for analysis.
3. To suggest possible recommendations to restructure the Technical Communication course syllabus on the basis of findings.

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do you enhance your employment potential and entrepreneurial skills through the contents of present syllabus?
2. Do the contents of syllabus provide scope to improve your domain specific vocabulary?
3. Does the syllabus cover the core Technical Communication skills / Technical Writing skills / LSRW Skills / Interpersonal Skills etc.?

1.2. RESEARCH PROCESS AND ANALYSIS

By administering the structured questionnaires to students of selected universities the perceptions of major stakeholders and faculty members of Technical Communication course were collected. The descriptive analysis used Frequency Distribution for the present study which is a tabulation of the number of times that each different value appears in a particular set of values. The frequency for each value is represented in the form of percentage distribution. The open ended questions and the written responses in all the questionnaires were discussed separately under qualitative analysis.

4. STUDENTS' PROFILE

Usually the students are both male and female gender and both of them are of Indian origin. The number of male students is more than that of female students. In fact, a majority of the students hail from different academic backgrounds and a major chunk of them come from Commerce stream in graduation. The rest come from other disciplines such as Engineering, Arts and Sciences. The institute wise demographic information is depicted in the table 2.

Table: 1. List of Selected Universities and Size of the Sample

S. No.	Name of the Institute	No. of Respondents
1	Andhra University	51
2	Sri Venkateswara University	57
3	Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Anantapuramu	50
4	National Institute of Technology, Warangal	28
5	GITAM University	57
6	V R Siddartha Engineering College (Autonomous)	60

Table: 2. Institute Wise Demographic Information

S. No.	Demographic Parameter		Name of the Institute						Overall Mean %
			A U %	SVU %	JNTUA %	NITW %	GITAM %	VRSEC %	
1	Gender	Male	66.7	59.1	57.1	75.0	52.0	65.5	62.5
		Female	33.3	40.9	42.9	25.0	48.0	34.5	37.5
2	Medium of Study at School Level	Vernacular	45.1	47.7	32.0	37.4	---	24.9	31.2
		English	54.9	52.3	68.0	62.6	100	75.1	68.8
3	Course Studied at UG Level	B.Com	78.4	59.1	62.0	---	32.0	58.4	47.7
		B. Sc.	11.8	27.3	32.0	13.5	8.0	15.0	17.9
		B.Tech.	2.0	4.5	6.0	86.5	50.0	21.7	28.4
		BBM	7.9	9.1	---	---	10.0	5.0	5.3
4	Native	Urban	41.1	33.0	59.1	80.0	76.0	57.7	58.3
		Semi-Urban	11.7	10.3	27.3	12.0	20.0	3.8	14.1
		Rural	49.0	56.8	13.6	8.0	4.0	38.5	28.3
5	Average age Group (in years)		21	22	21	25	22	21	22

For the second part of the study, faculty teaching the course of Technical Communication in the technical and conventional universities, private universities and autonomous institutions of Andhra Pradesh were selected as a sample from the population and administered the online questionnaire after seeking their consent over telephone. Since the aim is to develop a perspective on course components of Technical Communication, the sample is representative sample of the population

1.3. ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNERS' RESPONDS

Table: 3.Frequency for Technical Communication Course Contents (AU)

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (51)				Percentage			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Do you find the contents of the course inter-disciplinary?	22	08	11	08	44.9	16.3	22.4	16.3
2	Are you confident of improving your employment potential and job skills through the current course contents?	28	13	08	01	56.0	26.0	16.0	2.0
3	Are the course contents activity based / practice oriented?	24	11	09	05	49.0	22.4	18.4	10.2
4	Are the course contents redundant and monotonous?	06	09	17	13	13.3	20.0	37.8	28.9
5	Do the course contents reinforce grammatical and lexical competencies?	18	08	13	10	36.7	16.3	26.5	20.4
6	Do the course contents provide scope to improve your domain-specific vocabulary?	27	12	07	03	55.1	24.5	14.3	6.1
7	Do the course contents cover the following important Business Communication Skills?								
	Telephone Etiquette	15	10	12	13	30.0	20.0	26.0	24.0
	Presentations	32	16	01	01	64	32	2.0	2.0
	Taking Part in Meetings	23	12	09	05	46.9	24.5	18.4	10.2
	Correspondence and Report writing	13	19	07	09	27.9	39.6	14.6	18.8
8	Do the course contents provide opportunities to enhance following Business Writing Skills?								
	Note-taking	11	04	21	13	22.4	8.2	42.9	26.5
	Note – making	12	04	21	14	23.5	7.8	41.2	27.5
	Letter writing	31	18	01	00	62.0	36.0	2.0	0.0
	Drafting notices	12	12	18	04	26.1	26.1	39.1	8.7
	Creative Writing	07	02	15	26	14.0	4.0	30.0	52.0

Frequencies coded as: 1=Yes, 2= To the most extent, 3= To the least extent, 4= No

Table 4. Frequency for Technical Communication Course Contents (SVU)

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (56)				Percentage			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Do you find the contents of the course inter-disciplinary?	13	32	11	00	23.2	57.1	19.6	00
2	Are you confident of improving your employment potential and job skills through the current course contents?	12	30	12	02	21.4	53.6	21.4	3.6
3	Are the course contents activity based / practice oriented?	09	25	17	04	16.4	45.5	30.9	7.3
4	Are the course contents redundant and monotonous?	07	22	15	10	13.0	40.7	27.8	18.5
5	Do the course contents reinforce grammatical and lexical competencies?	03	16	20	16	5.5	29.1	36.4	29.1
6	Do the course contents provide scope to improve your domain-specific vocabulary?	09	29	15	03	16.1	51.8	26.8	5.4
7	Do the course contents cover the following important Business Communication Skills?								
	Telephone Etiquette	17	25	08	05	30.9	45.5	14.5	9.1
	Presentations	27	26	01	01	49.1	47.3	1.8	1.8
	Taking Part in Meetings	8	19	24	04	14.5	34.5	43.6	7.3
	Correspondence and Report writing	11	15	26	04	19.6	26.8	46.4	7.1
8	Do the course contents provide opportunities to enhance following Business Writing Skills?								
	Note-taking	12	13	14	16	21.8	23.6	25.5	29.1
	Note – making	14	06	18	17	25.5	10.9	32.7	30.9
	Letter writing	24	18	08	04	44.4	33.3	14.8	7.4
	Drafting notices	03	08	28	14	5.7	15.1	52.8	26.4
	Creative Writing	03	10	19	24	5.4	17.9	33.9	42.9

Table.5. Frequency for Technical Communication Course Contents (Teachers Response)

S. No.	Variable	Frequency				Percentage			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	Do you think the course contents are relevant to the MCA discipline	19	12	01	00	59.4	37.5	3.1	0.0
2	Do you find the course contents inter-disciplinary?	13	15	03	01	40.6	46.9	9.4	3.1
3	Are the course contents of Business Communication creative and sustain learners' interests?	19	10	02	01	59.4	31.3	6.3	3.1
4	Do the syllabus components balance four skills of language?	30	00	00	02	93.8	0.0	0.0	6.3
5	Do the course contents provide opportunities to reinforce and enhance learners' grammar and vocabulary?	16	08	06	02	50.0	25.0	18.8	6.3
6	Do you think Technical Communication course should extend beyond one semester?	27	00	00	05	84.4	0.0	0.0	15.6
7	Do the course contents cover the following core skills of Technical Communication?								
	Oral Communication Skills	21	07	03	00	67.7	22.6	9.7	0.0
	Business Writing Skills	19	08	04	00	61.3	25.8	12.9	0.0
	Inter-personal Skills	15	11	05	00	48.4	35.5	16.1	0.0
	Intra-personal Skills	12	15	04	00	38.7	48.4	12.9	0.0

1.4. Findings from the Student and Faculty Responses

- The *course contents* are inter-disciplinary in nature and aim at promoting the employability skills of the participants.
- As most of the students hail from urban, convent based and cosmopolitan backgrounds the study reveals that their grammatical and lexical competencies are reasonably sound.
- The worth mentioning feature of the course is the integrated approach towards all the subjects. Nevertheless, what needs the attention of the curriculum designers is the opinion of a few students regarding the monotony and redundancy of the items prescribed in the syllabus.
- Though the contents seem a little redundant yet they reinforce the grammatical and lexical competencies.
- Th opinion of the participants is that the course contents need better attention with regard to the grammatical and lexical competencies of the learners.
- As the *coursecontents* have the potential to equip the students for job opportunities as inter-disciplinary in nature.

- The skill component is accorded the priority and the workplace linguistic traits are also touched upon. The syllabus contents also strike a chord with reinforcement of grammatical and lexical competence.
- In nature, the contents of the course are inter-disciplinary and relevant to the technical domain and duly taking into account the needs of the learners. The faculty were of the opinion that both receptive and productive skills should receive due attention with a huge emphasis on reinforcing grammatical and lexical competencies. An interesting observation worth mentioning is that the teachers are vocal with regard to offering the course in two semesters.

1.5. Findings from the Responses of Human Resource Personnel

A structured interview questionnaire was used to gather feedback from Resource Personnel working in reputed IT companies. The findings from the responses are as follows.

- Communication Skills are considered as one of the key criterion in the job selection process.
- According to them the communicative abilities of the most of the job seekers are unsound and not up to the standards.
- The IT Personnel opined that the course contents need to be modified by duly addressing the needs of the industry and job market.
- They never peruse the course components before initiating the selection process.
- They provide feedback/suggestions at the end of the selections to the concerned faculty or department.
- They test the candidates' writing skills, inter and intra personal skills besides oral communication skills.
- Most of the companies organize pre-induction training programme for selected candidates.
- The key suggestion forwarded by the Resource Personnel is that Technical Communication course must be extended to more than two semesters and a laboratory component must be part of the course.
- Though the prospective candidates possess the content due to lack of confidence and proper grammatical knowledge they fail to deliver the content eloquently and appropriately.

1.8. Summing Up and Recommendations

The contents of the Technical Communication course must include the following aspects:

- Domain-specific, learner-friendly, enriching creativity, critical and analytical thinking
- Coherent (Simple to complex), more skill-centred and task-oriented
- Contemporary, improving employment potential and in tune with industrial needs
- Cover topics / areas such as written communication, public speaking, persuasive and ethical communication, mediated communication and employment communication
- Facilitating learning outcomes by providing adequate time for each element
- A judicious mixture of theory and practice with the combination of linguistic, phonetic and communicative skills
- Promoting technical knowledge and language learning by reinforcing grammatical, vocabulary and lexical competencies

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