

APPROACHES TO ENHANCE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AMONG ENGINEERING GRADUATES THROUGH JAM SESSION IN A MIXED CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Communication skills are essential to increasing the employability of engineering graduates. It is observed that majority of engineering graduates lack speaking skills. Sufficient guidance should be provided to students in the direction of workplace communication. Thus, universities need to review the language and communication courses and teaching methods to reach and surpass the needs of all stakeholders. Therefore, taking these challenges into account, this paper focuses on the importance of English speaking skills among engineering graduates in a mixed classroom, and the challenges they face in both academic and professional life and their potential remedies. The pre-test and post-test were performed on 30 engineering students to assess their speaking ability levels. The findings indicate a substantial increase in their oral competency. The aim of the paper is to develop the oral competency of students through Impromptu or JAM session speaking activity.

Keywords: *Speaking skills, employability, teaching methods, challenges, potential remedies, and oral competency.*

Introduction:

Over the years English speaking has become an important communication tool, at both national and international levels. One has to know, understand and communicate effectively to be successful in any field. In the field of engineering education - whether to acquire knowledge from books or to give presentations either in the seminars or conferences, to publish the research papers- in every walk of professional life, English is used as a common means of communication. Speaking skills are extremely essential for engineers in spite of being qualified and proficient in their academic career. Engineering students may find it difficult to understand the concept expressed by the authors if they are not proficient or good at English. Therefore, fluency and a good grip on English language plays a vital role for engineering graduates so as to prosper in their career. It is observed that majority of engineering graduates lack speaking skills which are looked for by the industries in their prospective employees especially in young graduates. However, the main problem lies in the importance of equipping our students with these soft skills and the obstacles they face while implementing them.

Due to the prevalence of global interaction between firms and universities, even the Employers in the corporate sector crave engineers to be eloquent in English so as to communicate effectively in the work place. Their main aim is to catch a large part of their business globally. They are also searching for highly skilled and well talented persons who can connect well with others and convince them to sell their goods. The businesses are therefore trying to recruit people whose communication skills are exceptional and

remarkable in addition to their subject matter. Consequently, speaking skills are put higher in their engineering pursuit. Allegations have always been the foundation of the practice of speaking but now engineers must learn to overcome with the current speaking difficulties in looking for, and retaining a good job due to increased employability. In the competitive engineering world, young engineers who are reluctant to convey their musings, share feelings or keep themselves from speaking on account of language hindrances may not survive for long. Therefore, training students with the requisite skills to speak effectively is key to becoming one of the basic elements of communication skills. JAM session seems to be the basic foundation to improve the speaking skills of the aspirants. The purpose of this paper is therefore, to report on a study conducted at one of the engineering colleges which looked into the development of a speaking skills based on workplace scenarios through Impromptu, Extempore or JAM session. The emphasis is put on students' fluency in communicating rather than on the accuracy of the language.

I. Importance of English Communication for Engineering Students:

Employers trust students who learn a diverse range of skills in various work environments. In addition to analytical and problem-solving abilities, the most important attributes for engineers are subject-specific expertise, analysis and enhanced decision-making capacity, communication skills, understanding of other cultures, trust and flexibility to work in an international environment.

If student fails to see the wider business environment scenario, and lack the speaking skills, a superficial degree of comprehension can be threatened. In these two decades, the growing emphasis put by employers on oral communication skills is echoed internationally. Speaking skills are extremely essential for engineers in spite of being qualified and proficient in their academic career. Engineering students may find it difficult to understand the concept expressed by the authors if they are not proficient or good at English. Therefore, fluency and a good grip on English language plays a vital role for engineering graduates so as to prosper in their career.

Teaching Oral Work force Learning Skills:

Effective communication strengthens engineer's optimistic view. At large, Lack of useful speaking skills lead to the poor engineering profile in the public at large. A more constructive, dynamic and approachable style of communication may be more appealing for the people. In fact, Verbal skills and delivery skills believed to improve the chances of employability, and these are the only major components in deciding whether a student's career will succeed or fail. But these are the only critical skills yet overlooked in the world of work. Hence, Speaking skills are learned abilities that students need to be taught to communicate with other.

Even though pursuing engineering, students are incapable to communicate appropriately in English dialect due to several factors such as insufficient time to learn English in the class, not being supported or encouraged to practice outside the class, socio-cultural background, skepticism, lack of inspiration and determination, unsuitable and non-viable curriculum, lack of contribution and involvement, lack of trained and skilled teachers, students with varying degree in the same class, unable to complete the syllabus owing to time constraint, lack of relevant methodologies, and so on.

The students are not empowered to speak in English though the curriculum proceeds to be in English. Consequently, if students do not learn to speak or have no opportunity to speak, they will soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. On the contrary, speaking class can be enjoyable if right things are taught in the right way, thereby increasing the enthusiasm of learners and making the English language classroom enjoyable.

Stating the Problem and its Rationale:

The engineering students of today do not give enough priority to the English language and offer their specific subjects or core subjects' prior preference. They, therefore, lack basic language skills, especially vocabulary, speaking skills and grammar usage. Consequently, in job interviews, they are unable to satisfy the interviewers. On the other hand, conventional methodology is being followed by most of the professors in engineering colleges. Consequently notable progress is not seen among the students in learning new skills which are essential for their employability. In the third year of engineering a subject called 'Advanced Communication' is introduced, where the students are asked to listen to the conversation of played audio in English labs. In spite of being engaged in group discussions to express their thoughts, students fail to speak in English language.

In this study, using an exploratory and realistic approach, JAM as a method to improve speaking skills is assessed in a class room. It emphasized on the following objectives:

1. Exploring the effects of research in a regular learning process inside the classroom using the JAM approach
2. To transmit the vital information needed and provide the estimated impact to the learners
3. Creating a contribution to a larger learning climate for learners

The study will ameliorate the standard of students speaking skills by adopting suitable techniques and procedures for proficiency and accuracy of speaking skills

Methodology:

The process of the research paper continued to identify and solve the problems of speaking by using JAM as a tool. The first step is taken to conduct a pre-test to measure the standard of their speaking abilities in English classroom. Later the researcher accompanied by collaborator in organizing classes with certain guidance and tips to students to enhance their speaking skills. All the observation during the period are recorded for the purpose of argument and evidence.

Over 60 students are selected from various levels of classes with different background. This mixed group of class is taken for systematic training and practice for one month on how to present their views, opinions and expressions in their JAM presentations. They have also practiced the Do's and Don'ts in the JAM sessions. There are two levels of practice for 10 days each, grouping the participants into cycles. Cycle 1 is very simple testing their basic competency with simple verbal and nonverbal practices. Cycle 2 is carried in two sessions each for 5 days to show their actions and initiations involving them into language focus on giving examples, using connectors, linkers and idiomatic expressions in their language proficiency.

Action and Observation - Cycle 1:

Soon after conducting the pre-test, cycle 1 is carried out for the select students where they are all very much worried about speaking in English. The researcher asked them, "Speak about yourselves." Next, they have given time to prepare themselves, following guidance on how to utilize the time of ONE minute to cover the major points in the given topic. The next one is asked by the researcher "Tell about your future plans". Thus the cycle continued to encourage the basic competencies of the students. During this time, the students are very interesting but fail to express their ideas freely because of their language hurdles. The interaction session helped the students (to get rid of their fear from) to go away from their fears of speaking in English during their presentation.

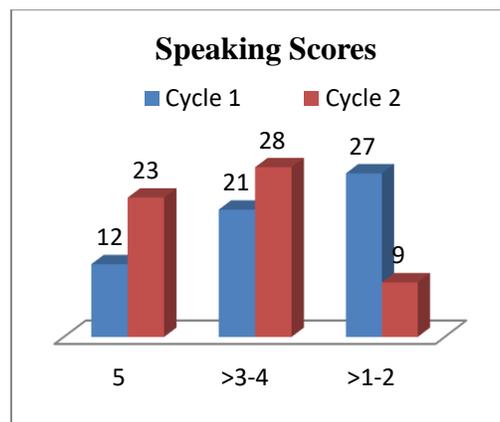
Observation:

- i. Students have low motivation
- ii. Less attention to the language practices

The researcher tried to overcome these problems in the cycle 1 by motivating them on the importance of English speaking skills in the present scenario and exhibiting some Ted Talks to the students on the necessity of speaking skills. The researcher has also given ample opportunities to all the select students to get a chance to speak in front of all, on various topics without paying much attention to the hurdles of their speaking flow.

Cycle 2:

During this session, most of the students have actively participated in the activities organized on various topics. Though there are certain language lapses in their presentations, the collaborator and the researcher has encouraged them to speak first and then try to rectify the pitfalls. The researcher has paid attention to vocabulary whereas the collaborator, on speech mode with grammar observations. Continuous practices, inputs, major observations on drawbacks of their presentation make them to participate actively in the class room practice with corrected and refined presentation as they are given scores. They tried to speak correctly compared to the pretest and cycle 1. They enjoyed the topics during the course of their presentation. Everyone is paid proper attention and also much priority to their presentation. It made them active and never bored in their presentations.



The application of JAM Session to enhance the speaking skills of engineering graduates was successful after completion of two cycles of training and practice to the select students. The findings of the observation through teaching and learning process, semi structured interviews, variations in the select students training and others show that there is a striking difference between the pre and post tests conducted during the research. The researcher observed that the variation between the cycle 1 and 2 is 18% to 30% depending on the training and individual interest.

The teacher provided the topics, inputs and all the best practices to be carried out during their presentation of speaking skills. The continuous watch and encouragement made the students to participate actively in the activities and come out with their original presentations. Though the target expected through the paper as mentioned in the previous discussion may be below to the expected but the outcome of the work is quite satisfactory. Below table exhibit that there is a minimum improvement in speaking skills presentations through JAM sessions. To assess the students speaking scores in the cycle 1 and 2, the researcher prepared the following table;

Comparison of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2			Difference	%
1	48	64	16	33.33
2	44	60	16	40
3	48	64	16	33.33
4	48	64	16	33.33
5	36	56	20	55.55
6	32	48	16	33.33
7	48	60	12	25
8	36	52	16	44.44
9	40	56	16	40
10	40	48	8	20
11	36	52	16	44.44
12	40	60	20	50
13	40	60	20	50
14	40	60	20	50
15	32	56	24	75

Out of 60 students' performance, only 15 students' performances in the cycle 1 and 2 are presented above with difference and % of difference. The average % of the growth shows that there is an improvement in the students. This improvement is the result of the continuous practice and encouragement given to the students.

Before Cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
The students had lack of motivation in learning English, especially in speaking activities	Students were induced in learning English	Students became more inspired to learn English and involved in speaking activities.
The students were ashamed and unconfident to speak in English	Students were more confident to answer question and give comment.	were more actively answer question and give comment.
Some students were passive /afraid during the teaching and learning process.	Throughout the cycle of teaching and learning the students were more involved	Throughout the teaching and learning process, the students were more involved in speaking practices

In terms of improving their vocabulary, JAM added some different vocabulary during the practice and training sessions. The tasks given to them were interesting and also encouraging them to use idiomatic expressions and appropriate use of vocabulary to make proper expressions keeping in the mind the time constraints. There are many activities practiced during the practice sessions for improving speaking skills. All these **activities** helped the selected students to perform better comparatively to pretest and the cycle 1

Conclusion:

The analysis and interpretation of the data collected and observation made during the cycles discloses that the teacher play a critical role in organizing JAM sessions and encouraging students to participate

voluntary in improving their speaking skills. The students taken up for the investigation is from Engineering level with mixed groups, so the analysis exhibit the % of improvement a little bit low. If the students are taken from the individual and regional groups, the result may be very high. However, it is also observed that there is need of creating awareness among all the engineering students that there will be better employment opportunities if they excel at speaking skills. At the beginning level, it is teacher-centered and gradually it turns into student-centered learning. It is also observed through this investigation that the teachers have to switch over from their age-old and outdated practice methods of teaching in the classroom in enhancing the speaking skills. They are supposed to adopt the latest techniques in the teaching of language. The present research proves that there is a striking improvement in speaking skills if the students are given proper and systematic training through proper encouragement.

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