

The Significance of English Language Resource Centres for Engineering Graduates

- Madhurima

It is a common sight to see Language Resource Centres (Language Labs) getting established in many professional institutions. Infact, it has become a buzzword in the context of infrastructure available under the banner of State-of-the-Lang Labs. There was a time when people were amazed at the very term called “Language Labs”. However, in the present era of science and technology, in multinational companies and needy banking institutions soft skills are demanded from the young graduates. Though there are more than sixty and odd soft skills, language skills play a dominant role in the plethora of them. Certain receptive skills, especially the genre of listening skills can be effectively imparted in the digital language lab. Certain expressive skills of the students, speaking and writing can be learnt in the digital Language Lab by using network software. Hence the million dollar question is to what extent language could be utilized to develop the various skills of our graduating students. Effective and efficient Lab oriented activities are necessary for the development. The teacher acts as a mentor in order to facilitate learning in classrooms. For this a teacher should be aware of the latest technologies, explore new ideas and have a certain amount of specialization in the subject. Students can overcome their inhibitions and exhibit their proficiency with unlimited enthusiasm, where they convert weakness into strengths.

Because of present scenario they need technology based learning which is quite different from the conventional classroom method of teaching and learning. They are more attentive when we teach any activity using power point presentations and over head projectors. We should try to teach everything as activities. The space and comfort of the language Lab increases the Students interest in language. Language teachers motivate the students in Lab sessions by conducting classes on “Personality Development”, “Interpersonal Skills” and “Soft Skills” which are essential factors to mould them into a perfect professional.

Communication is always directly associated with the personality of an individual. It is highly recommended to understand the ward much before we start mentoring. Without mentoring we are only transferring information, which is way behind teaching. Three aspects make an individual communicate effectively, namely, personality, adequate knowledge of the field, and the ability to compose ideas and to express them through non-verbal and verbal communication.

The number of technocrats graduating from Indian universities is very high. All these technocrats need to work in an international scenario with people coming from different nations. This need makes them aware that it is their communication skills and soft skills that play a vital role in getting on well in a given situation. In today's age, there is a need for sustenance and survival in an international atmosphere both in higher education and in MNCs. Undoubtedly interpersonal relations depend greatly on communication skills.

Therefore, it is imperative that technocrats of India be understood by the rest of the world with which they are likely to communicate. It is important to note that a host of the factors mentioned including pronunciation, culture, and the context, come in the way of intelligibility. Thus speech intelligibility is a significant and deciding factor in attaining success.

Keeping in view the importance of English language for the students who intend to go abroad for higher studies and for placements in multi-national organisations the faculty are thriving for the improvement of communication skills, soft skills, personality development etc.

English Language Resource Centres

English language Resource Centres are recognised as an essential resource for students in the new millennium. In order to equip the students with the necessary communication skills to take on the highly competitive world around them, a language lab is an invaluable facility as it provides them with ample opportunity to bridge the gaps in their learning process and hone their talents and help them to face the world with competence and confidence. The best solution is the provision of a facility like a language lab to suit the needs of the students.

A range of language functions of particular relevance to Engineering and Technology is exemplified in the English Language Resource Centre. This new approach is task based and skill-oriented. All the four skills involved in learning a language namely listening, speaking reading, and writing are developed through various tasks. By working through the activities, students, both fluent and less fluent are able to prove their effectiveness in using English as the means for development and empowerment in their chosen profession.

Keeping the necessity and importance of developing language skills of engineering students in the mind, the syllabus of English for first year engineering students has been modified and restored as per the requirements of the present situation. In this new approach, all the four skills involved in learning a language Viz LSRW are developed through various tasks in theory and lab sessions.

English Language Resource Centres and Their Significance

The use of language Resource Centres in teaching English is relatively new concept in our country. Language Resource Centres, a contribution of technology to language teaching, has rendered teaching of English language more successful, more rapid and more interesting. In the present age of information technology, language forms the basic aspect in science and technology. Science can be learnt as a subject where as the art of communication has to be practiced as a skill. Even gold medalists miss some of the best chances due to lack of good communication skills and hence knowledge and communication form the two sides of the career.

In order to learn skills, adequate exposure of the language and practice is very much needed. This is possible only in the Language Resource Centres which assures a sense of privacy to the learner and functions as self study center. In addition to this, authentic learning materials are supplied and carefully designed (Individual, pair and group) skill-oriented activities are performed in the labs to develop language and communication skills of the students.

English Resource Centres Profile

Globalization has brought in numerous opportunities and has thrown open to engineering graduates unprecedented opportunities, with more focus on the students overall capability apart from the academic competence. Many students, particularly those from vernacular medium, find that they are not preferred for the jobs due to their inadequacy of communication skills and soft skills despite possessing sound subject knowledge and technical expertise. Keeping in their pre-employment needs and career requirements and as per the revised curriculum of English, the department of English has recently established the state-of-the-art Digital Multimedia English Language Resource Centres replacing the conventional labs.

The Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Lab has the capacity of 32 workstations apart from one Instructor Workstation. This software based language Resource Centre aims to familiarize the learners to the nuances of English Speech sounds, Word accent, Sentence accent, Rhythm and intonation, to neutralize the influence of the regional accent and to bring about a consistent accent and intelligibility in their spoken English.

The Interactive Communication Skills (ICS) Lab with good acoustics and well equipped with the latest technological aids Viz., T.V with large screen, VCD, LCD etc., that facilitates the students develop their soft skills and presentation skills under the supervision of the faculty. ICS Lab aims to build up the confidence of students and enhance their performance at Placements, Interviews, Group Discussions and Presentations.

CALL lab is set up on similar lines as the one in the EFLU, Hyderabad. It is a conventional language lab consists of thirty individual booths and each booth comprises two Record players, Headsets with Microphones and student console. The communication system of all these 30 booths is connected to the Master console from where teacher and student could interact without disturbing other students in the lab. This lab facilitates the recording of their own imitations and responses, listening to them, checking their pronunciation against Master Voice and identifying errors and again representing correct answer. It is highly advantageous to the student who comes from vernacular medium and have little exposure to converse in English. They can proceed to learn language at their own pace and on their own, with minimum assistance from the instructor.

The course content in phonetics contains oral exercise in pronunciation, stress and accent in the order of word, sentence and discourse level. Suitably designed lab class materials make provisions for learners to verify the language rules relating to stress, shift, intonation and grammar, which were learnt in the theory classes. The lessons in isolation in the phonetics lab come handy to each student when they participate in the activities conducted in the interactive communication skills lab.

Benefits

- To sensitize the learner to the nuances of English Speech Sounds, Word Accent, Sentence Accent, Rhythm and intonation ...etc, under the best conditions with carefully selected and graded authentic materials.
- To neutralize the influences of the regional accents.
- To bring out a consistent accent and intelligibility in their English by providing an opportunity for practice in extensive and intensive listening and speaking.

Interactive Communication Skills Lab

This Lab is equipped with Power House, T.V's, VCP and VCD Player. VCD player is used to play CD's Containing Conversion in English that help the learners practice situation- specific protocols, The learners are also shown recorded programs and English motivational films. The main activities conducted in this lab are Introductions and Greetings, Role-play (Simulation), Group Discussions/Brain Storming, Interview

Techniques, Pictionary, Debates, Public Speaking and Language Games and Personality Development(NLP). These activities are helped to the learners to equip with linguistic and other communication skills and to handle formal and informal situations with ease.

Benefits

- To improve the fluency in spoken English.
- To interpret the meaning of oral language in its true sense.
- To help the students for their overall personality development.

Activities Conducted In The Author's Institution (CBIT, Hyderabad)

COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL) LAB

- Towards better Pronunciation
- English Speech Sounds
- Body Language (Non-Verbal Behaviour Interpretation)
- Listening Comprehension IELTS
- Word Accent
- Rain Water Harvesting (Documentary)
- Listening Comprehension – TOEFL
- Word Stress and Rhythm (Practice on the System)

INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS (ICS) LAB

- Express your views
- Group Discussions
- Pictionary (Information Gap Activity)
- Group Presentations in Mock Seminars
- Debate
- Film Review
- Interview Skills
- Information Gap Activity (Creative writing)
- Role Play and Stimulation
- Public speaking (Lab Internal examination)

Conclusion

For professionals in India, the ability to communicate well in English has become more important in the midst of ever increasing globalization today. Academicians assume that exposing students to authentic CALL&ICS lab materials and methods designed by so-called native speakers of English would meet this need to become proficient in the language. But actual classroom experience suggests that for engineering students CALL and ICS lab activities are necessary to improve their English Language proficiency. This is a way towards achieving good teaching and learning, certainly, its future must be

nurtured but the teacher, instead of receding into the background, must even be more active, motivate, inspire in making sure that learning takes place in the class-room.

A language teacher acts as mentor, trainer and aspirant because his/her primary goal is to train students to become entrepreneurs and be conscious of their social roles.

The use of Language Resource Centres are considered to be a radical shift from the teacher centered approach to an independent and enjoyable learning experience.

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