

Transformative Pedagogy: Assessing the Role of English Language Instructors in Indian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Various countries have established Quality Assurance (QA) models for their higher education institutions in response to their own national circumstances, as a customary practise for progress and advancement. India is not an exception. Periodically, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India has been publishing literature that offers valuable insights into the Indian experience with regards to quality assurance. Upon reviewing these documents, we discern that the government's viewpoint on "Quality education" can be understood as the attainment of educational outcomes that align with societal needs while minimising associated expenses. Given the aforementioned concept, it is vital to investigate whether contemporary higher education institutions are truly suitable for the purpose of imparting the necessary knowledge and skills to students and meeting the needs of society. The presence of new students at our universities serves as evidence of the educational standard. As university teachers, it is our responsibility to implement the university curriculum and exert significant effort in shaping these students to meet global standards. The given context pertains to the notion that while we may be unable to alter the past experiences of students, there is potential to facilitate their transformation into competent global citizens. This paper examines the effectiveness of English language instructors in universities in facilitating transformation in students who have undergone the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: pedagogy, universities, English language teachers, teaching/learning process, curriculum, educational standard etc.

Introduction

Universities, in their capacity as gateways to knowledge, aspire to offer students high-quality education that will equip them with the necessary skills and expertise to thrive as competent professionals in the global marketplace. It is feasible to achieve this goal by providing students with clear instructions that prioritise their understanding of fundamental subjects and the underlying concepts as outlined in the relevant curriculum and syllabus. The educators responsible for implementing the curriculum must possess a high level of competence in teaching. They should not only possess knowledge, skills, and effectiveness in instructional methods, but also demonstrate an understanding of the unique needs and temperaments of the learners. In the realm of higher education, there exists a significant emphasis on concepts such as learner autonomy, the role of the teacher as a facilitator, monitor, and mentor. Consequently, it becomes imperative for educators to enhance their teaching abilities in order to effectively impart knowledge and information to their students.

Learners or students

While several authors may use the terms "learners" and "students" interchangeably, this article argues that learners exhibit a greater emphasis on their learning compared to students. A significant proportion of students who enrol in universities after undergoing around fourteen years of English as a Second Language instruction demonstrate a lack of proficiency or mastery in the language. The individual's linguistic proficiency indicates that they have undergone formal instruction in the language, although they have not acquired the practical skills necessary for effective oral and writing communication. The article asserts that the term "students" is seen more suitable in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL), as reported by an ESL teacher from an esteemed university in Chennai, India.

The students who are granted entrance into professional courses by meeting the minimal marks criterion are considered to be the most confident and self-assured group. The desire to gain admission into a professional course exceeds their mere aspiration.

These students exhibit a lack of adherence to rules and demonstrate minimal motivation. According to Seth Lind Stromberg's categorization in 2008, the students can be classified into the following groups: Certain students may exhibit limited competency in the

English language due to their relatively short duration of English learning and lack of proper encouragement in their learning process. However, it is important to note that these students possess a promising opportunity to make significant progress provided they receive appropriate attention and support. Thus, by providing additional contemplation and accommodation, individuals might be effectively encouraged to engage in effective learning.

However, it is the group with low proficiency that causes disruptions in the classroom and poses challenges for teachers. The individuals in question do not place significant value on the various reasons for learning that educators and their more motivated peers recognise. These reasons include acquiring knowledge for the purpose of obtaining qualifications and advancing one's career, experiencing the allure of discovery, and bringing joy to one's parents and teachers (2008:6). Due to their persistent mindset, they are not easily swayed or convinced.

Context of Learning

Asian students, specifically Indian students, acquire proficiency in the English language primarily for academic and professional purposes, rather than for social communication in English. In order to remain pertinent in the global landscape of the 21st century, engineering graduates must possess a continuously expanding repertoire of abilities. Effective communication skills are an essential component that is widely acknowledged by both academia and industry. Communication is a complex phenomenon that encompasses a range of components, including spoken and written forms, listening skills, visual aids, multicultural understanding, and multidisciplinary perspectives.

The factors that need consideration while analysing communication in engineering education are outlined by Bygate(1987). In the present globalised context, engineers are required to possess proficient English communication skills in order to effectively fulfil their professional responsibilities. An English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course necessitates the customization of English language instruction to enhance students' communication abilities. It is expected to facilitate the process of globalising education and promoting the internationalisation of concepts and specialised knowledge among future engineers.

The significance of ESP becomes evident in the context of engineering education as it directs students' focus towards the specific terminology and communication skills that are essential in the professional domain. In everyday situations, particularly within human interactions, oral communication is characterised by the use of informal language features such as colloquialisms, ellipsis, deixis, false starts, repetition and rephrasing, backchannelling, imprecise language, run-ons, and overlaps (Bygate, 1987). Nevertheless, in a professional setting, there is an expectation for individuals to employ a distinct form of language that aligns with the ethical and etiquette standards of the workplace. In the globalised context, oral communication encompasses General English (GE) for interpersonal communication, as well as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for comprehending concepts and their practical application. Moreover, it fosters students' adaptability for transnational mobility and their ability to function effectively in a global work culture that emphasises teamwork, managerial and leadership skills, and other personal attributes. Therefore, the aforementioned competences have assumed a crucial role within the field of engineering (Ravesteijn, et al., 2006). The prevailing agreement suggests that engineering students who are taught English as a subject specifically tailored for their field, such as English for Specific Purposes or Technical English, in professional institutions in India and other locations, should be adequately equipped to confront the task of developing effective oral and written communication abilities in order to enhance their academic and professional opportunities.

The function of teachers is of utmost importance in the development of engineering or other professional undergraduate students for worldwide employment opportunities. Based on the observations made by teachers, it is evident that students lack the drive to develop their communicative competences in a progressive way and meet the requisite criteria by the conclusion of the curriculum, despite the inclusion of functional aspects of English. In order to rectify this deficit, it is imperative for educators to discern several methodologies and instructional programmes that can effectively tackle the existing issue of deficient oral communication abilities among engineering students. It is imperative for educators to adapt their instructional methods to align with the prevailing educational standards and the specific characteristics of their students, including their age, interests, and individual learning

requirements. A task plan that addresses the need for integrating language skills in a relevant content-based language training would be better suitable for professional advancement.

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach is a pedagogical framework that focuses on the development of cognitive and academic language skills in second language learners. The implementation of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach is necessary for classroom instruction, as it effectively incorporates learners' procedural and declarative knowledge, with a primary emphasis on content. The fundamental emphasis of the content-based curriculum lies in the execution of academic activities within a communicative framework. According to Chamot and O'Malley (1994), the inclusion of material in ESL/ESP classes is supported by this model, which identifies four justifications for this integration. The primary purpose of educational content is to provide students the opportunity to cultivate essential knowledge across many subject domains. Furthermore, students possess the capacity to comprehend, engage in discourse, analyse written materials, and produce written work pertaining to the concepts that have been formulated. Furthermore, students demonstrate enhanced motivation and interest when they engage with the content in conjunction with the language acquisition process.

Lastly, the content serves as a framework for instructing students in learning processes that can be effectively utilised within the context of classroom-based education. Furthermore, in alignment with the principles advocated by the approach, it is crucial for students to actively participate in self-assessment and peer evaluation. These practises, which contribute to constructive reflection, play a significant role in the developmental process of undergraduate students as they transition into professionals.

Task Based Language Teaching

The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method is an approach to language instruction that focuses on the completion of meaningful tasks as the primary means of language learning. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the primary motivation for Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is rooted in a theoretical framework of learning.

In addition to the aforementioned perspectives, the author posits that (a) Language serves primarily as a vehicle for constructing meaning, and (b) TBLT is informed by many models of language. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) encompasses various theories of language, including structural, functional, and interactional approaches. It recognises the significance of lexical units in both language use and language learning. Additionally, TBLT places conversation at the forefront of language instruction, considering it to be the cornerstone of language acquisition. The study employed Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a recognised approach for instructing interpersonal and academic communication, in conjunction with role play as a pedagogical technique. According to Jeon (2005), the process of language learning is highly intricate and encompasses the interplay of various factors, including materials, feedback, and activities. Jeon further asserts that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) exerts a favourable influence on these variables. To clarify, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers learners the opportunity to engage with authentic and meaningful materials, participate in real-life communicative activities, and receive motivating feedback.

According to Stern House, it is proposed that the act of informing learners about the objectives of language acquisition could be considered a legitimate method. In this context, it is essential for the instructor to establish instructional objectives aimed at fostering learners' proficiency in oral communication and auditory comprehension. Moreover, the language materials used for instruction should consist of authentic, meaningful, and practical language, as emphasised by Brindley (1984: 56).

The instructor makes well-informed decisions before initiating the course, taking into account factors such as the students' language proficiency, age, aptitude, attitude, and the importance of the language being introduced for future contexts. The linguistic context, which refers to the language that learners are exposed to, plays a critical role in the development of language skills. In instances where the learner's linguistic expressions are lacking clarity, the instructor has the option to employ interactional modifications (Long, 1985). This involves providing support during the interaction by elaborating on the learner's utterances, so aiding them in obtaining a precise linguistic model of their intended message (Ellis, 1990). The achievement of success in language acquisition is contingent upon the amount of time allocated for learning (Carroll, 1981).

Consequently, it is imperative for educators to incorporate targeted reading of materials that are directly relevant to the subject matter being studied (Krashen & Brown, 2007). Additionally, the implementation of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, is essential in Technical English and higher education classrooms, where English serves as both the medium of instruction and the subject matter.

The concept of learner autonomy refers to the ability of learners to take control of their own learning process.

Over the course of the past three decades, there has been a significant shift in the perspective of language teachers towards the practise of teaching as a whole. In adherence to contemporary orthodoxy, educators have increasingly adopted communicative pedagogical methods that foster greater student engagement in the learning process. Learner autonomy is a concept that encompasses the capability to assume authority over one's own learning process. It is further characterised as possessing the capacity for detachment, engaging in critical thought, making informed decisions, and taking independent action. The concept of learner autonomy might vary in interpretation among individuals. In the realm of higher education, the distribution of knowledge and information is subject to time constraints and relies on the voluntary collaboration of learners. Consequently, learner autonomy is only observed in motivated and capable individuals.

Learner autonomy is frequently misinterpreted as exclusively referring to independent learning outside of the classroom, wherein learners have complete control over all parts of their learning process. According to this perspective, an autonomous learner is characterised by intrinsic motivation and engages in independent learning activities outside of the traditional classroom setting, without relying on instructor help. However, the development of learner autonomy can also be facilitated within the structured learning environment of the classroom, so becoming an integral component of the pedagogical aims of a language course. When a syllabus is developed with the intention of fostering learner autonomy, the primary emphasis of the syllabus becomes evident as being based around a student-centric approach.

In educational programmes that aim to foster learner autonomy by utilising technology, it can be advantageous to incorporate a constructionist perspective on language acquisition. The utilisation of a constructionist approach within education can facilitate students' learning within a social framework, fostering the development of their capacity to generate novel information, address unfamiliar challenges, and engage in creative and critical thinking. This approach aligns with the principles advocated by collaborative theories of knowledge transmission and underscores the active involvement of the learner in the process of learning. Experience is a fundamental concept within constructionist theory, as it posits that knowledge is only derived from personal encounters and interactions with the world. By employing a theoretical framework in course design, the student is perceived as an engaged participant who contributes their distinct learning attributes to the communal learning environment.

Conclusion

In order to ensure that students meet the necessary standards and receive high-quality education, colleges must consider the expectations of both industry and society. This may be achieved by equipping students with the skills that are essential for their future careers.

By incorporating these talents into subject-specific modules, a combination of appropriate skills can be attained. The programme should encompass strategies and methodologies for integrating communication throughout engineering disciplines. Additionally, it is imperative to maintain the acquired communication skills and awareness from the first year throughout the duration of the course by means of project identification, discussions, and subsequent oral and written presentations.

The teacher remains actively engaged in supporting students in their educational pursuits. The cultivation of learner autonomy may exhibit significant collaborative aspects. Learners possess the agency to vary their level of independence during their learning journey, and it is possible to foster their inclination to introspect on their learning experiences and identify avenues for enhancement. The awareness that must be understood is that an independent learner can only be developed via the guidance of a knowing, skilled, and successful instructor. The heterochronous students express a preference for teachers who fulfil the roles of facilitators, guides, and mentors

rather than solely acting as instructors. They value the presence of a teacher who remains an integral part of the teaching and learning process, even in light of technology advancements.

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