



Effective Ways to Teach Oral Communication Skills to Engineering Students of Chhattishgarh

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ABSTRACT:- Communication skills namely LSRW, are among the intangible skill sets most valued by employers. Listening comprehension and speaking in English are the skills generally more frequently used than reading and writing in daily living in an English speaking country. But ever since the invasion of the multinational companies in India these skills have become indispensable for employability. Every professional, be it a technocrat, or a businessman, has to learn to sell and do self marketing intended to enhance and boost one's image or that of the organisation he is associated with; in the market, through myriad ways viz. oral presentations, seminars, meetings discussions etc. And all this calls for proficiency in oral communication skills. The ability to communicate effectively, especially during oral presentations, can boost one's marketability and viability for work in a variety of careers. To develop strong presentation skills, one needs to consider both the verbal and nonverbal factors involved in delivering the message. If you are an effective speaker, you will enhance your prestige, influence decisions and come to occupy more important equipment of life.

But many people, despite being a reservoir of knowledge, develop a cold feet when asked to give a public speech or render a business presentation. Many amongst us become anxious or start perspiring before attending a job interview or when we have to address the audience or the media.

Our success as a species and as individuals depends upon our ability to effectively communicate, both verbally and non-verbally. Verbal and non-verbal communication shapes our interactions with others in business and interpersonal relationships, as well as our financial and personal success, and our physical and psychological well-being. Understanding the different aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, and the important roles they play in our interactions with others, is the first step to enhancing positive communication and nurturing relationships.

Engineering students who come from divergent backgrounds should be equipped with these life sustaining skills and as teachers of language it becomes imperative that we make them adept and prepare them to face the challenges of professional life. In this paper I have shared my experiences through which I try to develop these skills in my students in an effective manner.

I. INTRODUCTION

Oral communication which is the process of verbally transmitting information and ideas from one individual or group to another can be either Formal or Informal. Examples of informal oral communication include:

- Face-to-face conversations
 - Telephone conversations
 - Discussions that take place at business meetings
 - Presentations at business meetings
 - Classroom lectures
 - Commencement speech given at a graduation ceremony
- More formal types of oral communication include:

Great communication skills are your ticket to success in the academic and business world. Knowing when to choose oral communication and polishing your speaking skills can help you at every stage of your career.

With advances in technology, new forms of oral communication continue to develop. Video Phones and Video Conferences combine audio and video so that workers in distant locations can both see and speak

with each other. Other modern forms of oral communication include Podcasts (audio clips that you can access on the Internet) and Voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP), which allows callers to communicate over the Internet and avoid telephone charges. Skype is an example of VoIP.

Advantages

There are many situations in which it makes sense to choose oral over written communication. Oral communication is more personal and less formal than written communication. If time is limited and a business matter requires quick resolution, it may be best to have a face-to-face or telephone conversation. There is also more flexibility in oral communication; you can discuss different aspects of an issue and make decisions more quickly than you can in writing. Oral communication can be especially effective in addressing conflicts or problems. Talking things over is often the best way to settle disagreements or misunderstandings. Finally, oral communication is a great way to promote employee morale and maintain energy and enthusiasm within a team.

Importance of body language in oral communication

Our body language is one of the most important element of effective oral communication. A major component of the message the receiver perceives is based on our body language. Our posture, facial expressions and gestures affect the way our message is received. Consistent eye contact with members of the audience; a calm, confident posture; and relaxed arms and hands held near side are among body language techniques that deliver positive vibes. Folding arms, avoiding eye contact, frowning, and nervous movements can signal nervousness, indifference or worse. To quote Meenakshi Raman, “ Your personal appearance, facial expressions, postures, gestures, eye contact, voice, proximity, touch-all of these nonverbal signals influence the way your message is interpreted or deciphered by your partners in a communication process.”¹(Meenakshi Raman & Prakash Singh)

Importance of vocal tone in oral communication

Apart from body language , another aspect which makes oral communication effective is voice modulation. How you say something carries a lot of weight.”The fascinating thing is that the human animal is rarely aware the its postures, movements and gestures can tell one story while its voice may be telling another.”²(Allan Barbara)

Speaking in a clear, confident and assertive tone helps project your message and keep your audience engaged. Emphasizing specific points and varying your rate of delivery brings out key points in your presentation and attracts your audience's attention. One should avoid speaking in a low voice or a monotonous tone.

Need for enhancement of effective oral communication skills for engineering students

My students often ask this question that why it is imperative to develop these skills .And the fact is that we simply cannot negate its importance for manifold reasons-

- Interviews are conducted in English for most of the jobs.
- It elevates the personality of the candidate.
- Every good concern insists on fluency in English.
- A good oral communication skill enhances the chances of getting frequent promotions, increments and other benefits in the corporate world.

Reasons for lack of effective oral communication skills

Although oral communication skills have become the need of the hour, it has been observed that majority of the students whether from English or Hindi medium schools lack good oratory skills. There are many causes for it:

- They are more comfortable in conversing in their mother tongue. They do not want to come out of their comfort level hence show resistance in accepting Language 2 as a medium for informal and day to day interaction.
- Most of the schools fail to provide an appropriate environment conducive for developing oral communication skills. Teachers speak in Hindi and give all instructions in the native language. How can we expect our students to learn to speak unless we do the same?” In rural areas in India, English is still taught from 5th or 6th standard onwards as the second or third language and the students are neither made aware of importance of English nor trained properly to have command over the language. It is a bitter fact that teaching of English in India is still to a great extent, examination-oriented only. Therefore, the vernacular medium students suffer from a syndrome that does not allow them to perform well in higher education courses”³(Sweta Gupta)

- Majority of the English medium students understand the spoken and written English and fair well in the theoretical exams but the same students fail tremendously in conversing fluently because they do not practise regularly, speaking in English.
- At college level, teachers are bound by a particular prescribed syllabus which they have to cover for the university exams. Besides, teachers of communication skills are not provided with adequate number of periods. Therefore there is more of spoon feeding and one way communication rather than having interesting interactive sessions which can encourage the students to develop oratory skills.
- It is ironical that despite having communication skills lab in almost every technical college today; students still lack good speaking skills. This is so because communication lab periods are curtailed to cover the other technical subjects, that are considered to be more difficult. Communication is given least importance as a subject at college level usually both by the management and the students. Although students do finally realise its importance when they fail to clear the GDPI on campus. By then it becomes a tad bit late.

Ways to develop effective oral communication skills through classroom activities

As already mentioned above that as teachers we have our own time constraints because of which we do not get sufficient space to imbibe these skills in our students. But on a personal plane, rather than succumbing to the pressures I have devised my own ways to provide room for students' interaction. In order to develop good oratory skills in the students I squeeze out ten minutes of time from my routine fifty minutes lecture and involve students in various activities which I have observed are really helpful for them-

1. Speaking in English should be made compulsory : Using simple practices can make a great difference in students' (and teachers') linguistic competence. Teachers should be communicative.

'In Japan, since sometime in the 1980s, the Ministry of Education (Monbusho)--recognizing that students who have studied English six years still can't speak it--has been revising curricula, revamping textbooks, and trying to redo the whole of English education at the secondary and even primary level. All this to improve students' English communicative ability'.⁴(Welker, James R.)

The best textbooks, teaching materials, syllabi, will ultimately fail, however, if the ordinary classroom English teachers do not model and use English communicatively in their classrooms. English teachers are the most important people in the English education of their students. Therefore every teacher must-

- **Always Use English in classroom:** English classes shouldn't be framed in native language.
- **Teach students "Classroom English"**

Teach the students classroom expressions appropriate for their level. Be sure they understand how to say and use the expressions you expect them to know. The more the students communicate with you and with each other in English the more easily and smoothly they will acquire these skills.

- **Teach Grammar in English too**

Start with what the students know. For example, if you are teaching present progressive (*be doing*), you can start by reviewing the present tense. Show the students a few sentences like

She plays soccer every week.

He cooks spaghetti every Tuesday.

Make sure the students understand these sentences. Then change *every week* or *every Tuesday* to *now*, *plays* to *is playing*, and *cooks* to *is cooking*.

She *is playing* soccer *now*.

He *is cooking* spaghetti *now*.

Give the students a few more sentences in present tense. After changing *every week* into *now*, ask a couple of students what to put in place of the verb in present tense. At the same time, teachers who primarily use English for instruction need to allow for students who aren't as fast at understanding these kind of ideas even when explained in L1.

As teachers, we ourselves should speak in English so that the students' ears become attuned to listening and comprehending in English. Do not act as an interpreter by translating everything in native language until and unless really required. Let us not forget that that all students even if they hail from Hindi medium school study English as one the subjects; at least from class six onwards. Therefore they have the basic understanding of the subject. Somewhere as teachers we should not allow much leeway to the students lest they should become inert. To make oral communication effective it becomes imperative to converse in English and the students should be encouraged to do so at least till they are in college premises. To ensure this-

- Divide the class into four to six groups and appoint a leader of each.
- Let the leader take over from here to ensure that all the members in his group are making efforts to speak in English.
- Once in a week hold Group discussion among these groups and applaud them profusely.

- This activity brings a huge positive change in their overall communication skills and even in their personalities.
- Small prizes can also be given to motivate them.

Correct but don't criticize your students

If you want your students to experiment, guess, and practice, you should encourage these behaviours. Let the students know you are pleased that they are trying--even if what they say is incorrect. When they make a mistake, praise them for answering and then ask them to try again, tell them the correct answer, or ask another student for the answer.

The one way to guarantee that the students will never say a word in English is to make them afraid to make a mistake. It's easy to get frustrated by a student who can't respond correctly to a simple question they've studied. But if your students see you quickly and often become displeased with them, they will be more nervous about speaking English and increasingly more likely to make a mistake. Or they will stop talking altogether..

II. NEWSPAPER READING

News paper reading is of two types. One is reading aloud and the other reading silently. In schools teachers compulsorily make students develop read the news aloud on stage. This practice helps the students to develop confidence to speak on stage and secondly it enhances their effective speaking skills as they learn to speak with correct pronunciation, voice modulation and body language; which is an important element of effective oral presentations.

During my lectures I do the same activity; that is I make my students read news aloud guiding them for pronunciation and voice modulation. Students partake in this activity with a lot of enthusiasm because this activity does not require rote memory. They can see and speak. It boosts the confidence of the students who have stage fear.

Besides, this activity also instils into them reading habit which helps in enhancing their vocabulary and expressions.

III. TALKING ABOUT SELF

To establish the initial rapport between the students and the teacher this activity really works. This activity is carried out in two stages. Firstly, the students are asked to write in points, about themselves which they would like to share with the other students; focusing on their personal, educational and cultural background. They are also encouraged to share their innermost feelings; or their passion, hobbies and dreams for life. In a nutshell this self introduction is a way to open up and reach out to others. As it is done in an informal manner, students love this activity. Some tell about their role model, others may disclose their weaknesses and fears of life. Some tell about their failures, and others express frustration over parental, peer and societal pressure While speaking many students get emotional and start crying; some get overexcited and try to address the audience as if they are real leaders. Some start shivering because of stage fear and some may even fumble. But as a teacher I see to it that every student speaks. Overall it, it turns out to be a very refreshing activity and paves the way for the students towards effective oral presentations.

IV. PLAYING WORD GAME

In this activity a simple and vivid word is given to a student for example ' Temple', ' colour blue', 'mother' etc. The student has to speak out on the given word maximum for a minute without fumbling, faltering or committing any grammatical error. If another student catches an error he points it out and becomes the next speaker. But the word changes. If it is a group activity, the words can be given by the rival team; or even by the teacher. Another way I make them play is as we play ' antakshri' where the next speaker has to start with one of the words which may have occurred in the last sentence. The students enjoy this activity to the hilt. In addition, it removes the fear of impromptu speaking.

V. GIVING REVIEWS ON POPULAR HINDI MOVIES

Everybody watches movies. Especially the youth is addicted to watching the popular stuff or the box office hits. If we ask them to read an interesting novel and write a review on it , not everyone would come forward willingly. But my experience has made me learn that every student loves to talk about his favourite movie, its star cast, the plot and the good or bad points of it. Again this activity can be both individual and group based. While giving the review the students learn to express their views clearly.

VI. GROUP DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS

This group activity helps the students to attain spontaneity while speaking. In group debate I divide the class into groups; each consisting of seven to eight students. A debatable topic of their interest is given where

marks are given to every group on the basis of relevant points they make and negative marking is also done if some student does not speak at all. This way I ensure that every student speaks up.

Alternately, I conduct group discussions where I see to it that every group consists of good as well as average students so that no particular group stands apart making others feel bad. Here, sometimes the topic is given a day prior so that they can prepare and come.

For every group activity I make group leaders whose task is to ascertain that all members of their group participate with vigour and zeal. I often give chocolates or pens as rewards to students on the basis of their sincere and consistent efforts.

Role plays

It is again a group activity where the class is divided into four or five groups. Each group is asked to pen down a script based on day to day life situations. For e.g. ragging, hostel life, evils of society etc. After writing it down they enact it on the stage. This activity opens up shy students as they are able to overcome their inhibitions. It also helps them to learn to speak according to different situations and contexts and improves their nonverbal communication as well.

VII. SMALL SPEECHES OR PRESENTATIONS

By this time the students are able to gain enough confidence to go for individual stage presentations now, in a formal way. They are given the freedom to select any topic of their choice and also the freedom to give either power point presentation or speech. Through previous activities they have already learnt appropriate body language and voice modulation. While rendering speeches or presentations they use it effectively.

Implementing these Ideas

The suggestions above may be simple and easy, but remember that they aren't a quick fix. If you want them to work, you need to commit yourself to English communication in your classroom, not to the strategies themselves.

Students aren't likely to use English just because you ask them to. If you don't insist that students speak English in class, don't be surprised when they don't. When the teacher switches to speaking mostly or all in English, a different kind of challenge presents itself.

For teachers and students who are, like many I've worked with and taught, accustomed to English classes conducted primarily in L1, introducing the above methods can be a radical change. In many cases ESL students have had everything explained to them in their native language for several years. Of course some students will resist this kind of teaching at first. They are accustomed to understanding everything the teacher says. When suddenly they are struggling to understand anything, they may not like it.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A thousand meetings, the best textbooks, creative teaching materials visiting the classroom aren't going to "give" ESL students English communicative ability. Only by using English communicatively with their teacher and classmates will students develop the ability to speak English. If, for example, you decide to teach some grammar points in English and not in L1, it might be more difficult for your students (and you), but they will probably remember the ideas better. This is because they actually have to listen and think about what you are saying. Thus, not only will their (and your) communicative ability improve, but so will their test scores.

Conversely, your students won't attempt to communicate in English if you are unwilling to do so yourself. You aren't just teaching spelling, vocabulary, and grammar in class, you are indirectly teaching your students the value of communicating in English. If you don't show your students by using English that you think it's important, they won't think it is. If students are taught primarily in their native language, they may learn how to read English, they may learn how to write English, they may learn how to translate English, but they aren't very likely to learn how to speak English.

It is rightly said that no height is too arduous for mortal men. Although teaching and learning skills of language are a mammoth task and cannot be obtained overnight. It is continuous and gradual process. Only those can succeed who have the passion for it whether as a teacher or a student. In my case, through persistent efforts and by consistently conducting these activities, I observe tremendous change in the body language, speaking skills and confidence of the students. And this gives me the stimulus to continue my journey...

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