

COMMUNICATION SKILLS LABORATORY: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ENGINEERING CURRICULUM IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Communication Skills Laboratory has been the part of engineering curriculum in Tamilnadu. This paper tries to find out the impact of communication skills laboratory among the engineering students. Besides improving communication skills of engineering students, the laboratory was introduced for helping the students to get through in their recruitment process. This paper has been worked out with the information provided by the students, teachers and former students who have used the laboratory. A set of questionnaires has been prepared and got responded from the teachers and students. There are a limited number of respondents who have been selected randomly. The questions are included personally so as to get the real picture of the impact.

It is noted that establishing the communication skills Laboratory is really a boon for engineering students particularly for the students from vernacular medium because many of them are not able to communicate effectively. The success of the laboratory lies in its implementation. So majority of the questions is focused on level of success and the collected information is reported in this paper. Though the syllabus is same, the level of implementation is varied from one college to another college. There are positive and negative results in the level of success. The suggestions and solutions are taken into account. A further study in this topic is also suggested.

KEYWORDS: Communication Skills Laboratory, Real Picture of the Impact

INTRODUCTION

Communication Skills Laboratory has been the part of engineering curriculum in Tamilnadu. This paper tries to find out the impact of communication skills laboratory among the engineering students. Besides improving the communication skills of engineering students, the laboratory was introduced. It is also intended to help the students to get through their recruitment process.

It is noted that establishing the communication skills Laboratory is really a boon for engineering students particularly for the students from vernacular medium because many of them are not able to communicate effectively. Many students pass in English by memorizing. The syllabus for communication skills was prescribed with the following note:

Many students, particularly those from non-English medium schools, find that they are not preferred due to their inadequacy of communication skills and soft skills, despite possessing sound knowledge in their subject area along with technical capability. Keeping in view their pre-employment needs and career requirements, this course on Communication Skills Laboratory will prepare students to adapt themselves with ease to the industry environment, thus rendering them as prospective assets to industries

(Communications Skills Syllabus, Anna University)

The university has also given the parameters for assessing the students' communication skills. It can be noted that the most of the institutions in Tamilnadu follow the syllabus of communication skills laboratory. At the end semester examination, more importance is given to speaking (Total weightage is 60% : equal importance is given to Group Discussion and Presentation). The success of the laboratory lies in its implementation.

QUESTIONS

To know the level of success, a personal feed back from a known group of students and staff members. The information has been received from the students, teachers and former students who have used the laboratory. A set of questionnaires has been prepared and got responded from the teachers and students. There are a limited number of respondents who have been selected randomly. The questions are included personally so as to get the real picture of the impact. The questions for students are given below:

- Has communication Skills Laboratory been useful to you?
- How many classes you attended in the laboratory? (Approximately)
- Have you used software?
- Name of the software:
- Is the software helpful to you?
- How many times have you done the presentations?
- How many times have you participated Group Discussion?
- Has mock interview been conducted in the laboratory?
- Have your Presentations/Group Discussions/ Mock Interviews been recorded in video/audio?
- Have your Presentations/Group Discussions/ Mock Interviews been assessed through such audio/video?
- Do you feel that the laboratory has improved your communication skills?
- Overall feedback about the communication skills laboratory? Your suggestions:

The questions for staff members are given below:

- How long have you been handling communications skills laboratory?
- How many classes do you conduct the laboratory for a semester?
- Have you been using software?
- Name of the software:
- Is the software helpful to your students?
- How many times do you conduct the presentations for a batch of students?

- How many times do you conduct Group Discussion?
- Has mock interview been conducted in the laboratory?
- Have you done the assessment through Video/audio?
- Overall feedback about the communication skills laboratory?
- Do you feel that the existing syllabus meets the requirements of the students?
- Your suggestions:

Feedback

Majority of the questions is focused on level of success and the collected information is reported. The students reported that the laboratory is very useful to them. Though the syllabus is same, the level of implementation is varied from one college to another college. There are positive and negative results in the level of success. It is informed that the laboratory is conducted effectively in well-known colleges. But students did not attend regular laboratory in many of the colleges as more concentration paid on their major subjects. It is considered as namesake.

Examination

It is also a fact that institutions are concerned with the pass percentage of the students. Though the university conducts tests on group discussions and presentations to assess the communication skills of students, the majority of students do their presentations and group discussions by rote memory. Once such students are cross-questioned, they struggle to communicate.

Campus Interview

This level of communication can also be observed in campus interviews. Many students do not succeed in the campus interviews though they have achieved considerable percentage in their academics. During one of the campus mock interviews conducted by experts from some famous software companies, the following points are given. The interviewer said that most of the candidates should improve their communication skills. Some candidates are struggling to explain about self and technical parts and a focus is needed in that area. Eye to eye contact is to be maintained. They should prepare a good resume. The interview was conducted after they underwent the communication skills practical.

PRACTICE

To improve their communication skills classes, the students listen to lectures. To get the desired results from the students in their communication skills, the practice is very essential. Dr. Laureen Wishom when discussed the evaluation of communication skills said:

Good communication skill can be achieved only after practice. You can observe your communication with others in front of a mirror. You will come to know your weak points and thus, you can bring improvements in your communication skills. You can record your communication in front of group or on video-tape. This is a good way for you to assess your recording or to have it assessed by an expert. From this recording, you will come to know about your presentation strengths and weaknesses along with any flaws or mistakes (Dr. Laureen Wishom)

Findings

It can be observed that the number of group discussions and presentations conducted are lesser. The software purchased by the institutions has not been updated for a long time. Teachers have given their opinions to enhance the software by correcting errors. Students want to have more assessments in the laboratory.

According to the information, the reason for the failure in communication is the different types of school education. It can be also noted that students from particular schools possess good communication skills. To provide education uniformly, the government of Tamilnadu introduced 'Samacheer Kalvi' in 2010. The impact of the education is yet to come.

Suggestions

- The syllabus can be enhanced in order to meet the requirements of the students periodically.
- Suggestions are given to create exercises to grasp students' attention and to learn interestingly.
- Instead of recommending software prepared by a private company, the software can be created by the university.
- The assessment can be done by recording through video/ audio.
- More interactive tasks should be done. Some extra creative exercises can be included in order to grasp students' attention and to learn interestingly/
- More focus should be paid more on the students' practice in group discussions, presentations and mock interviews.
- All the practices can be recorded and they can be displayed to students for their self-assessment.
- Staff members suggested conducting the adequate number of Faculty Development Programmes so as to train students more effectively

Limitations

Discussions about the laboratory are limited to the friend circle and few students in their classes. The content is based on the oral information provided; there is no formal data collection.

Further Study

A further study can be conducted to study about the syllabus of technical English comparing with the syllabus of communication skills as there are some similarities. Possibilities can also be explored to make them completely different from each other. For example, to find out the ways for including literature to teach English as it brings more lessons of life.

REFERENCES

1. Anna University syllabus for Affiliated Institutions Regulations 2008/ GE2321 Communication Skills Laboratory (Fifth and Sixth Semester)
2. Wishhom, Lauren, Dr., "How to Evaluate Your Communication Skills", Masterpiece Solutions, LLC, 2008 <http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewarticle.asp?AuthorID=34928> Feedback given by students and staff members

who uses the communication skills laboratory

