

REVAMPING THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM OF ENGINEERING COLLEGES IN TELANGANA

Dr A Sandhya Reddy
Associate Professor in English
CBIT, Gandipet, Hyderabad – 75

Abstract

It is often believed that students are the best judges of the curriculum, course structure and teacher performance. When the importance of language skills is discussed, students profess that communication skills are among the top priority. With the world becoming a global village, students of engineering and technology need a specific set of language skills for a successful academic and professional career. Industries are also voicing their concerns about the need for better communication skills among engineering students. Research indicates that only 20-25% of engineering graduates are employable i.e. possess the necessary skills required by the industry.

Engineering colleges affiliated to Osmania University in AP have English as a part of the curriculum only in the first year. This is highly unfortunate and grossly inadequate. JNTU has atleast introduced 'Advanced multimedia Language Lab' course in one semester of the third year. English language needs exist in every year of study in Engineering and it is practically impossible to include all competencies in just one academic year.

My paper attempts to emphasize the fact that English language should be made an integral part of the engineering college curriculum in every year of study. Apart from the essential grammar and vocabulary, different competencies like technical writing, proposals, scientific writing, business correspondence, functional English etc should be specifically designed and imparted to students every year based on the requirements. Mock group simulations, mock HR interviews, case studies and verbal analysis exercises along with relevant soft skills should be strengthened in the Language labs.

Therefore curriculum in English Language theory and labs should be revamped thoroughly and offered in every year of study in Engineering to suit the needs of the student and meet the demands of the industry.

Introduction

A few years ago English subject in an engineering college was a nonentity. It was a compilation of a few prose and poetry lessons which were of little importance to the professional student.

But now in the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization, the increasing use of English as the language of international communication has come. The English language has become by far the most prominent and relevant language in the world. Therefore it can rightfully be called lingua franca of the modern world and is systematically used in practically every aspect of life.

In this globalized context, students of engineering and technology need a specific set of language skills for their success in education and career.

Aim of an engineering degree is to provide young people with a foundation in engineering principles and above all important life skills. Young people will learn how to think for themselves and society, how to solve problems, how to work independently and as a part of a team. The fact that there are more than 150 engineering colleges in the state of Telangana is testimony to the importance of engineering education.

Engineers and English

The modern engineering aspirants represent the upwardly mobile rising middle class of a resurgent India. They know that in order to succeed and survive they need communication skills or in other words communicative competency in the English language. These skills along with other soft skills, employability skills, industry readiness etc... are the need of the hour. The employers demand it and the universities are trying to provide it. **Does the Osmania university curriculum where English is taught only for one year meet this demand?** Are the materials sufficient? Is the methodology appropriate? It is time for introspection.

The engineering students in Andhra Pradesh come from the urban and rural areas. This rural urban divide is posing a great challenge to the curriculum developers and the practicing teachers. English is the medium of instruction in the field of professional education but language proficiency is not a criterion for selection in any engineering college. The aptitude is assessed only by the knowledge level of basic sciences. The linguistic competency of the students from rural background is quite poor even if they are from English medium schools.

Peter Strevens observes:

“In some countries the fact of having followed a language course at school is no guarantee that a practical grasp of common core of English has in fact been acquired, so that a special purpose course in TTSE (Technical Technological and Scientific English) has to be preceded by an emergency course in English from scratch” (Strevens, 223-224).

English Curriculum in Osmania University affiliated colleges

Most of the students enter the colleges with little or no knowledge of the fact that English is a life skill. It is a challenge for the teacher to drive home this point in just one academic year, hardly spanning eight months. In this one year the student is bombarded with grammar, vocabulary, units on oral and written communication, business correspondence and technical writing, remedial English and four prose lessons. Along with this the student has to attend weekly lab sessions, the Computer Aided Language lab (CALL) and the Interactive Communication Skills lab (ICS).

How is it possible for a student to chew, swallow, digest and assimilate all this in one year? The students from rural backgrounds, the weak and slow learners, are totally lost and develop a fear of language learning. Yet they somehow study the course from the examination point of view and get through. It is only when they are in their penultimate year and are gearing up for their higher studies and placements that they realize how ill-equipped they are. These options demand a relatively high level of proficiency in language and communication from the student for the selection process. Unfortunately the current curriculum does not contribute significantly in this direction. Today English language is not merely a subject but a life skill. A candidate who is proficient in the language and possesses good communication skills is more likely to succeed than one who doesn't.

In order to emphasize this skill gap and at the same time find out the students view point on the efficacy of the existing curriculum a survey was conducted. Ten questions related to the English curriculum of Osmania University affiliated colleges were given as a part of this survey.

The Survey

The survey was online and a heterogeneous group of students belonging to all branches of engineering were a part of it. They were students belonging to all years of study and some passed out students too. Over 85 students took this survey with a majority of them from the final year. It is these students who are aware of how important English is as they are now facing placements, writing competitive examinations and preparing for higher studies.

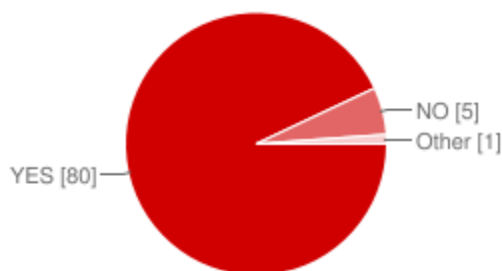
1	11	13%
2	10	12%
3	3	3%
4	56	65%
Completed	6	7%

Summary

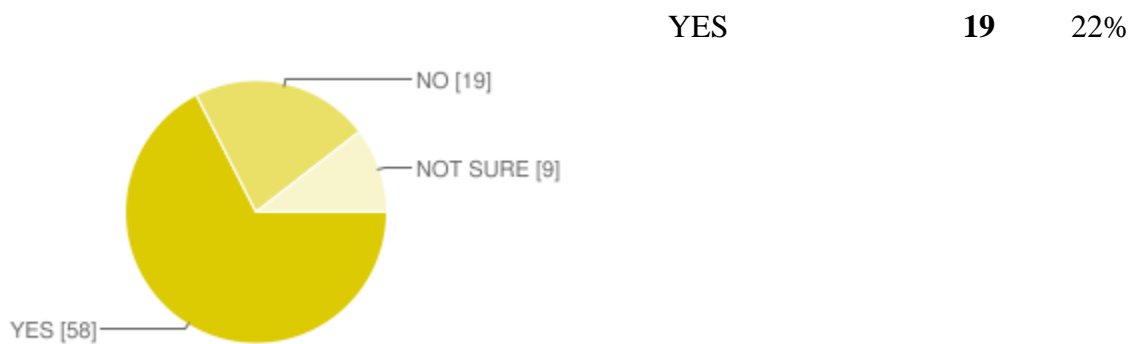
YES	80	93%
NO	5	6%
Other	1	1%

Branch		
Mechanical Engg.	21	24%
Production Engg.	4	5%
Electronics and Comm. Engg	19	22%
Electronics and Electrical Engg.	5	6%
Computer Science Engg.	18	21%
Information Technology	6	7%
Civil Engineering	4	5%
Bio Technology	4	5%
Chemical Engineering	4	5%
Master of Computer Applications	0	0%
Master of Business Administration	1	1%

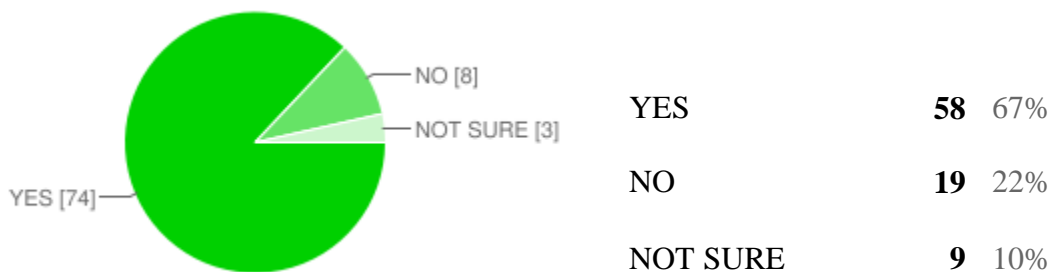
1. **Do you think learning English at the engineering level is necessary?**



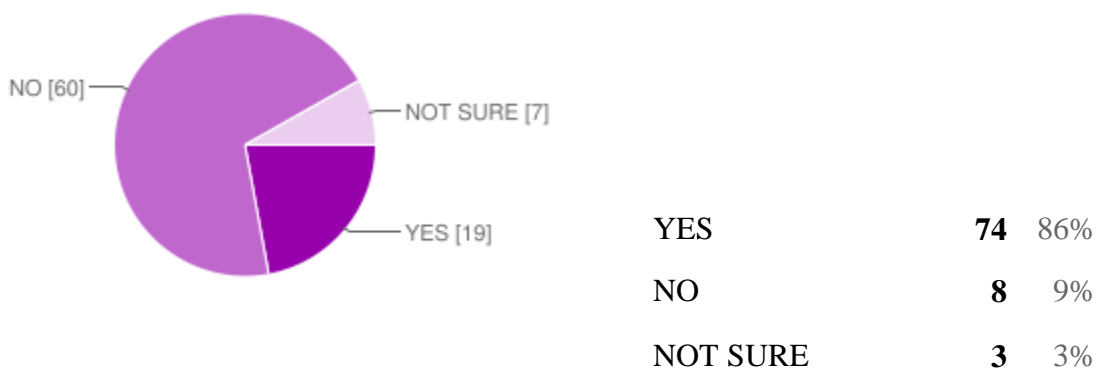
2. Do you think that English should form a part of the curriculum throughout engineering (i.e. from the first year to the pre-final year)?



3. Do you think students should be involved in the process of curriculum design?

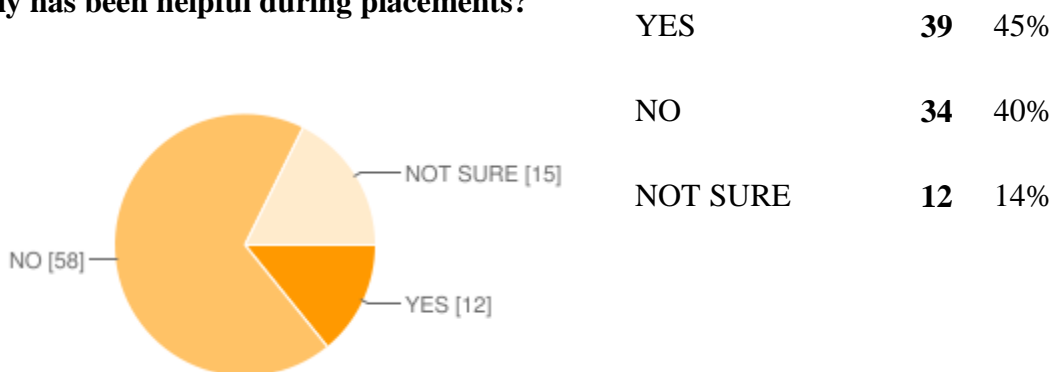


4. Do you think the current curriculum lays equal emphasis in acquiring and developing the four basic skills namely Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing?

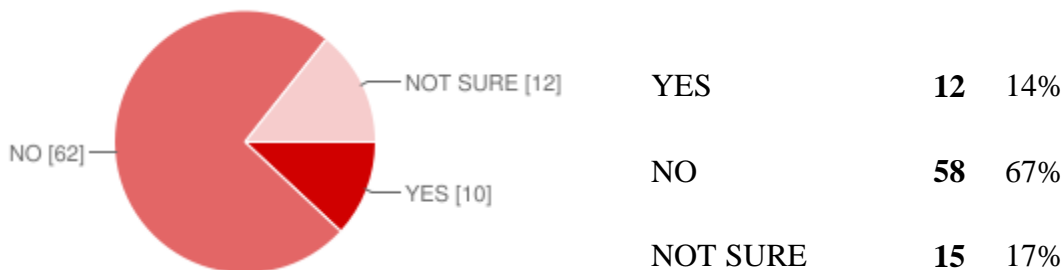


				NO	60	70%
				NOT SURE	7	8%
5. Do you think the language labs have been helpful in honing the various skills?	YES	10	12%			
	NO	62	72%			
	NOT SURE	12	14%			

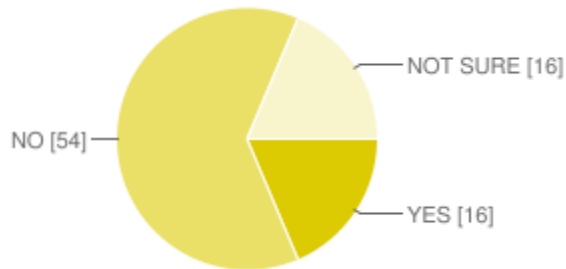
6. Do you think that the current curriculum which forms a part of the course in the first year only has been helpful during placements?



7. Do you think the current curriculum is helpful in facing various competitive exams?

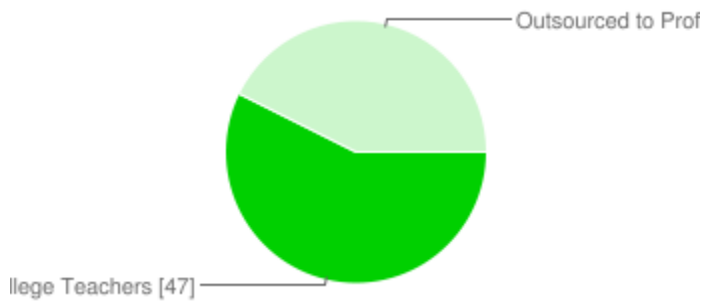


8. Do you think that the current curriculum is relevant to the needs of the students?



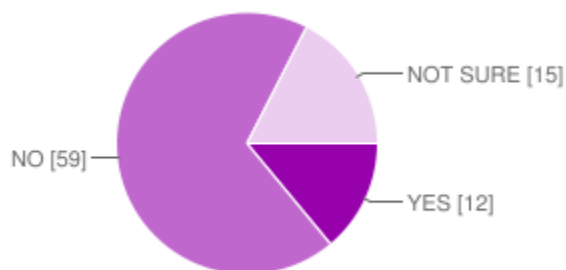
YES	12	14%
NO	59	69%
NOT SURE	15	17%

9. Who do you think should impart the curriculum?



YES	16	19%
NO	54	63%
NOT SURE	16	19%

10. Do you think the current curriculum is helping the students become industry ready?



College Teachers	47	55%
Outsourcing	35	41%

Analysis of the Survey

- 93% believe that English is necessary at the engineering level
- 67% feel that English should form a part of the curriculum throughout engineering.
- 86% believe that students should be an integral part of curriculum design.
- 70% are of the view that the current curriculum does not lay emphasis in acquiring and developing the LSRW skills.
- Only 45% believe that language labs are helpful.
- 67% opine that current curriculum is not helpful during placements.
- 72% think current curriculum is not helpful while facing competitive exams.
- 63% believe that current curriculum is not relevant to the needs of the students.
- 47% feel that the teacher is responsible for imparting the curriculum while the rest feel that it should be outsourced.
- 69% are of the opinion that current curriculum is not helping the students become industry ready.

Inferences

It is evident from the survey that the students who are the chief stakeholders are dissatisfied with the present curriculum. They believe that English should be offered in all years of engineering, with different competencies identified for different years. Many students feel that even they should be a part of curriculum design so that their needs are better addressed.

Most students especially from the engineering background have three career choices after graduation – work, pursue MS in foreign universities or go for an MBA. In preparing the student for these challenges the present curriculum is inadequate. Imparting various soft skills is absolutely essential in the present scenario and can be done as a part of the English course. This will groom the student to be industry ready and will equip him with holistic skills.

Quite a few students opted for professional outsourcing to teachers. So it can be inferred that a lot has to be done in the areas of teacher development and training.

Recommendations

The present curriculum of English in Osmania university affiliated colleges of engineering is an overloaded syllabus offered only in the first year of study. It is clear that students require different skills at different junctures of their engineering study.

The first and second year of engineering can be given to strengthening basic grammar, vocabulary, LSRW skills, technical writing, presentation skills, public speaking, pronunciation

and so on. Constant practice and drilling is required and special remedial classes should be offered to the students from the rural background.

During their third year of study, exclusive training should form a part of the curriculum to enhance their employability skills. Rigorous and continuous practice may be given in the language labs in Group Discussions, Case Studies, Mock Interviews, Resume Writing and so on. Soft skills like leadership qualities, teamwork, time management, decision making, problem solving, grooming and etiquette may be imparted to develop their personality and to make them industry ready.

Reading practice and comprehension, writing tasks, verbal analysis and common errors maybe given due importance throughout to help them face competitive examinations.

Thus it is recommended that the needs of the students and the relevance of the syllabus be taken into account by the University while designing the curriculum.

Conclusion

Communication is the most important function of a human being, be it in personal or professional life. To be successful in any field one need to know and understand how to communicate effectively. Engineering professionals who are proficient in English and other soft skills have a considerable edge over those who have not. Lack of these skills will certainly make the professional short of resources. Therefore there is a great need to frame course materials and develop methods and strategies so as to enhance LSRW skills and soft skills of engineering graduates.

The results of the survey are a clear indication that the present design of the curriculum is inadequate and unsatisfactory. The curriculum of English in the engineering colleges affiliated to Osmania University must be revamped to teach, train and groom the students to face the many challenges ahead.

References

- 1) Huckin, N. Thomas and Leslie A Olson. *English for Science and Technology: A Handbook for Nonnative Speakers*. Singapore: McGraw Hill(1983).
- 2) Keane, A and Gibson, I.S. *Communication trends in engineering firms: Implications for Undergraduate Courses*. International Journal of Engineering Education, 15, 2, pp 115-121 (1999).
- 3) Kitao, K. *Why do we teach English?* The Internet TESL Journal, 2, 4, pp 1-3 (1996).
- 4) Strevens, P. "*Technical Technological and Scientific English (TTSE)*". ELT Journal, 27-3, 223-224(1983).