

# Challenges in Teaching & learning Professional/Business Communication in Technical & Professional Courses

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**Abstract:** The ultimate aim of Technical & Professional Education is to impart Skills to the learners; to prepare them for their better future. One that opts for a professional degree aspires to be recruited in an esteemed organization. In an era of globalisation where every second person holds Technical/professional degrees the success mantras become more complicated, so it becomes extremely important to focus on an unavoidable ability that plays a vital role in the entire process of selection. In such an atmosphere where English language is broadening its compasses and taking the entire world into its sphere, Including Professional Communication as compulsory subject for all students pursuing Technical/ professional courses, to develop professional Skills has failed to reach desired outcome.

Reason is Professional Communication classes in these courses are characterized by a poor attendance of learners and disinterestedness. The Faculties teaching this subject has to face enormous challenge. This paper is an attempt to come out with challenges faced by both faculty in teaching and learners in learning. At the end to reach at certain conclusion where these challenges could be overcome.

## **Introduction- “67% Engineers in India can neither ‘walk’ nor ‘Talk’ English.” (Times of India)**

The term Professional Communication is used to cover the English taught to a wide range of professional students in full-time education preparing for a career. It is a compulsory subject in the first year of all Technical/ Professional courses. The objective behind teaching this subject is to enhance the communication skills of students pursuing these courses and to make them industry ready. However, most students who have undergone the courses are not yet able to communicate effectively in the language. And face great difficulty at the time of placement.

**Objectives-**The objective of the study are mentioned below;

1. To gather students experience and views related to the issues on language learning problems at college and university level;
2. To analyze how far Socio-Economic background, Early education, Social surroundings make a difference in language learning process.
3. To gather students and faculty's suggestions on ways to enhance English language learning and teaching.
4. To identify the academic and professional needs of students.
5. To examine the existing syllabus, how far it meets the students' communicative needs.

## Background of Study

Today, we come across a new generation of students in technical & professional institutions who lack language competency and confidence to express them either in writing or in speech. The problem is why the ongoing subject is missing the mark and the learners in Communication classes do not acquire the skill they are supposed to. What needs to be done to make teaching & learning process result oriented.

**Aggarwal (1984)**, The English learners can be classified as the ‘elites’, the ‘aspirants’ and the ‘victims’. On their language abilities.

**(Dakin, 1968: 8)** The ‘elites’ and the ‘victims’ represent the extremes of a cline, and the ‘aspirants’ take the middle position.

To understand the root cause of the problem we have to look back into the learners educational background, our English teaching related policies. The way English is taught in our schools and colleges is to a great extent responsible for the failure. The aims of English education and teaching are certainly very lofty and there are inadequate. The students face difficulty in learning communication skills, to some extent the government policy on ELT is also responsible. Reason is English is taught from class III class or VI onwards, and with Hindi and Sanskrit following the three languages formula, after class IX onwards English becomes optional. Students finding English difficult opt for other optional subjects.

The students can be categorized into two categories; the one is having Hindi or a regional language as medium of study throughout and the other is having English as the medium of study. Hence, the problem in teaching English, to Hindi medium students begins from their early education. Student at senior secondary study English as Literature and Language both are treated as two separate school subjects English is taught through Prose, Poetry, Short Stories, Drama. Teacher only bother about completing the prescribed syllabus within a time, teachers hardly bother about the application of those, no real importance is placed on communication skills.

## Teaching and learning Challenges

In technical /Professional Courses for admission, Emphasis is on Core subjects ( Physics, Chemistry, Maths or Physics, Chemistry, Biology) Or Graduate in any discipline at PG level courses. No English is required for it; Students take the competitive exam and qualify with excellent percentile, take admission in renowned colleges. The actual problem starts from their onwards; English/ Communication Skill. At this stage English becomes very important not only as a subject but also for placements.

## Challenges Faced by Faculty

Challenges before the faculty teaching professional Communication are enormous and apparent. One faces challenges from both the ends, management and students. Where there is always a pressure to complete the syllabus within a time and on a same time to work on student's communication skills and make them industry ready. Challenges are mentioned below

- The teachers also have very limited teaching hours, mostly three to six hours per week which are not enough to teach the Communication Skill.

- Students see little value of this subject, They have other priorities for that students devote their time and attention on core subjects.
- Students are bored because they are not innately interested in the content and they don't see the relevance to their academic /or professional goals which is not true.
- Overcrowded class in which it is quite difficult to pay attention individually.
- Lack of proper infrastructure in terms of sitting arrangements, advance language lab, software's, equipments, trained lab staff etc.
- Lack of faculty training /development programs .
- Less and over loaded staff ,lack of uniformity in salary structure.
- Time slot allotted for PC/BC is always second half , at this point students are tired and do not show the required level on the topics or activities.
- Faulty examination pattern is also a major factor which is responsible for the failure, reason exam is written and questions are based on theory, what students do rather attending class regularly they simply copy the notes.
- Exams specially for this subject should be based on practical application of these skills .
- Motivating students to attend the class/ lab is another challenge .Because some students hesitate during activities and avoid communication class .

### Challenges Faced by Students

In this entire process of teaching and learning of communication skills actually sufferers are the student's ,who's skills after passing the exam with good marks remains inadequate and had to suffer at the time of placements and later had to go to big coaching centers for personality development or similar:

- Lack of three A's (awareness, attitude, and aptitude)
- More focus on Domain specialization.
- Error phobia and imperfect phobia , most of the students look at this subject with a prejudiced vision and bear the fear through the year. Students only concentrate on passing marks.
- Less teacher and more student syndrome, Firstly the learner them self feels shy in practicing these skills , if he/she tries in day –to –day life, friends or other students rather than motivating often demoralize them by making fun of their mistakes or Mother tongue effect in pronunciation .
- It is a widespread misunderstanding amongst students specially coming from rural areas that English is very difficult language.
- Lack of desire as local language serve all purpose of daily living
- In learning English motivation is the crucial force which determines the success in mastering a language. Any Language could be mastered by rigorous practice. But the surrounding does not allow the learner to practice any of these skills,

### Review of Literature

Helped the investigator to acquaint with correct knowledge in the area of research

**The British applied linguist David Graddol** says in his book English Next India (2010) that the official position of English in India remains that of a traditional necessity. But this position has been over taken by events happening. For growing globalized urban middle class, English is playing a greater role in both their work and personal lives. According to a survey carried out by the Indian channel CNN-IBN in August 2009, 87% people feel that the knowledge of English is important to succeed in life but 82% feel that knowing the state language is very important and interestingly 57% feel that English is making us forget our mother tongue. Isn't it a very confusing

that to succeed in life one should know at least three languages ; the mother tongue, the national and an international language , If English is an international language , then we must promote its systematic and planned learning.

**Agarwal .S, and Chintranshi,j,** Faculty Perceptions of Business Communication Skills and Need of Management Students 'Electronic Journal of knowledge Management Volume 7issue 3. MC PHERSON 1998) Numerous articles (for example Buckley,1989,Thompson& Smith ,1992)Suggests that business schools are failing to help students developing needed competencies and skills these factor confirm that B- Schools are facing regarding failure to groom students with the required skills and competencies essential to the new work place and yet the efforts to overcome this failure have proven fruitful to a limited extent.

The content of all technical and business management programme , the nature of its curriculum and how it meets the needs of business life distinguishes a B-school from its competitors (**Baruch and Leeming 1996**)This curriculum is crucial to all the stakeholders the employer the Business school faculty and the students. Given the importance of curriculum to all the stakeholders and given the dramatic changes in the work place environment. It is essential for business educators to incorporate changes in their curriculum in order to meet the changing workplace demands.

**Stevens (2007)** in her article "How Satisfied Are Employers with Graduates' Business Communication Skills" affirmed a concomitant result -- employers find current graduates deficient in this area. Her study included a survey of 104 Silicon Valley employers. She found that "employers in Silicon Valley are not fully satisfied with the business communications skills of new hire graduates. Employers in her study expressed a need for strong communication skills as well as writing skills. The findings of Porterfield (2004) supported employer views reported in other studies regarding the importance of communication skills in employees.

## Methodology

First of all, the required research tools were developed which include questionnaires for students and faculty that has both types open ended and close ended questions was designed .To ensuring easy readability the questionnaire was prepared with options. The language was kept simple and easy to understand.

- **Research population** - Students and Faculty of professional /Business Communication.
- **Sample-** The sample was chosen from Ist and IInd IVth & VI th Semester students from different courses.
- **Sampling- process** In present study A Random Sampling , Stratified Sampling , is applied for data collection .
- **Location-**Engineering &Management colleges of Utter Pradesh & NCR region.

## Data collection& Analysis

Data is collected using questionnaires, focus group, interviews. Stratified random sampling was used to select the sample colleges within the whole population. 12 colleges were selected from different locations. Total Faculty teaching PC/BC Respondents =68

Total students Respondents= 530

The sample included students from 1<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> semesters. Maximum number of respondents was from 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> semester followed by 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> respectively.

**Table N0-1.1**  
**Data collected from faculties:**

Srno	Respondents	Questionnaire Distributed	Response Received	No Response
1	Professor/Hod's	12	8	4
2	Associate Professor	22	18	4
3	Assistant Professor	34	32	2
4	PDP/Soft Skills trainer	12	10	2
	<b>Total</b>	80	68	12

Above Table shows total no of questionnaire distributed =80  
Number of response received=68 ,No response= 12

**Table N0-1.2**  
**Faculty's response on educational background, affects learners English learning ability.**

Agree	Disagree	Total Response
45	23	68
66%	33%	

Above table shows faculty's response on educational background, affects learners English learning ability. On this matter 66% respondents agreed with the fact that teaching students from Hindi or other regional background with very little knowledge of English in all the forms is a difficult task.

Whereas 33% respondents disagrees with it putting forth the fact that no student is perfect in communication skills ,one can learn and master these skill with rigorous practice.

**Table N0-1.3**  
**Faculty's response on government policy on ELT (Three language formula)**

Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Total Response
20	30	18	68
30%	44%	26%	

Above table no-6.29 shows faculty's response on government policy on ELT (Three language formula) as per this policy English is taught from class III onwards . 29% of respondents agreed

while 44% strongly agreed in total= 73 respondents agreed with the fact that it affects a lot. Whereas only 26% denied it.

**Table N0-1.4**  
**Faculty's response on uniform syllabus, in Central& State Boards**

Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Total Response
37	31	-	68
55%	45%	-	

Above table shows faculty's response on uniform syllabus, in Central& State Boards at Senior Secondary level. Out of total= 68 respondents 54% agreed and 45% strongly agreed that there should be a uniformed syllabus and evaluation system.

**Table N0-1.5**  
**Faculty's response on the purpose of English teaching Learning should be defined well**

Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Total Response
20	30	18	68
30%	44%	26%	

Above table shows faculty's response on the purpose of English teaching and Learning should be defined like (academic, technical & managerial )at Senior Secondary level. 29% of respondents agreed and 44% strongly agreed total =73% responded positively with it .while 26% disagreed.

**Table N0-1.6**  
**Faculty's response on students not exhibiting the required level of interest in Language/ communication classes**

More focus on core subjects	Boring and very lengthy topics	No prior knowledge about the subject	Other Reasons	Total Respondents
30	14	10	14	68
44%	21%	14%	21%	

Above table shows faculty's response on students not exhibiting the required level of interest in Language/ communication classes.44% of respondents feel that students are more focused on core subjects.20% respondents feels that at times topics are too lengthy for the students to concentrate and understand thus start lacking interest in them. 14% of faculty feels that some students have no or very little prior knowledge of this subject. 20% of respondents feels some other reasons of it because whether students want or not to study the fact is that , it's a compulsory subject.

**Table N0-1.7**

### Faculty's response on the present professional/business communication syllabus

Quite Satisfied	Not Very Satisfied	Not Satisfied At All	Total Response
26	20	22	68
38%	30%	32%	

Above table shows faculty's response on present professional/business communication syllabus. Out of total =68 respondents 38% responded in quit satisfied, while 29% were not very satisfied with the current syllabus taught in course and 32 % of respondent were not satisfied at all.

**Table N0-1.8**

### Faculty's response on Teaching Professional Communication up to the completion of the Course as practice oriented course

Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Total Respondents
20	33	15	68
30%	48%	22%	

Above table shows faculty's response on Teaching Professional Communication as practice oriented course up to the completion of the Course. 29% of respondents agreed while 48% strongly agreed in total= 77% respondents agreed that it should be done . Whereas only 22% were in against of it.

**Table N0-1.9**

### Faculty's response on the professional/business communication syllabus to be more practical and less theoretical

Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Total Respondents
22	36	10	68
33%	53%	14%	

Above table shows faculty's response on syllabus should be more practical and less theoretical. Out of total= 68 respondents 32% agreed and 52% strongly agreed total 85% agreed on syllabus should more practical and activity bases. Only 14% disagreed.

### Data collected from Students:

**Table N0-1.10**

### Student's response on the Effect of Educational Background in Learning Communication Skills

Total no of Students	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
530	202	210	60	48
Total %	38%	41%	11%	9%

Above table shows Students Response on the Effect of one's Educational Background in Learning Communication Skills.

Out of 530 response (38%) agreed, (41%) strongly agreed total=77% said yes educational background (Hindi or English)of students affects in learning communication skills .

While (11%) Disagreed and (9%) Strongly Disagreed total= 20% saying with the fact that these are skills and like other skills Communication Skills can also be learned through self-motivation and rigorous practice.

**Table N0-1.11**

### Student's response on Prior knowledge about Communication Skills

Total no of response	Yes	No
530	310	220
Total %	58%	41%

Above table indicates the Prior knowledge of students on Communication Skills. Out of total - 530 responses. 58% of students responded positively , but not of theory. 41% completely denied about any prior knowledge .These were mostly from Hindi medium students from rural areas.

**Table N0-1.12**

### Students response on uniformed curriculum, grading system in all the Central & State boards

Total no of Students	Disagree	Agree	No response
530	50	430	50
Total %	9%	81%	9%

Above table indicates Students Response on uniformed curriculum, grading system in both the Central & State boards

Out of 530 respondents (81%) agree on above question and only (9%) Refused, while (9%) didn't respond.

**Table N0-1.13**

### Students Response on the purpose of English Learning should be defined



Total no of Students	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
530	225	150	100	55
Total %	42%	28%	18%	10%

Above table indicates Students Response on the purpose of English Learning should be defined at Senior Secondary.

Out of 530 respondents 42% agreed, 28% strongly agreed total =70% of responded in favour of defining the purpose of studying English will clear the picture for them and students will opt according to their interest.

While only 28% responded negatively

**Table N0-1.14**

**Students response on introducing Communicative English from the class-1**

Total no of Students	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
530	200	210	80	40
Total %	37%	39%	15%	7%

Above table indicates Students Response on introducing Communicative English , right from the class-1.

Out of 530 respondents(37%) agreed,(39%)strongly agreed total =77% responded in favour of introducing communicative English from class-1in both Hindi, English medium schools, this will not only develop interest in the subject but also give them time to practice and better understand its basics.

Only 22% response were in didn't agreed with this

**Table N0-1.15**

**Students Response on business communication should be taught more as a practical or theoretical**

Total no of respondents	Practical	Theoretical	As both
530	250	105	175
Total	47%	20%	33%

Above table shows that47% of respondent are in favour of teaching Professional/Business Communication in practical form only, 19% students in theory ,while 33% of students were in favour of both as theory is equally important to understand the concepts.

**Table N0-1.16**

**Students Response on “In which semester BC/PC should be taught”**

Srno	Courses	First year only	In final year	From first year to the completion of course	Total No response
1.	MBA/PGDM	52(41%)	36 (28%)	40(31%)	128
2	MCA	42(33%)	38(31%)	45(36%)	125
3	B.TECH	61(31%)	70(34%)	71(35%)	202
4	Biotech	22(29%)	30(41%)	23(30%)	75

Above table indicates Students Response on Professional/Business communication should be taught in all the semesters, as teaching PC in first year is not enough and students need it more in Final year.

The result shows that 40% of Management students replied that First years is sufficient ,28% replied rather than teaching this subject in first semester ,it is better to be taught in final year ,31% were in favour of teaching from first till the completion of course .

Similar kind of response was from MCA students 33% replied teaching in first year for one semester is right.30% opted for final year. 31% were in favour of teaching from first till the completion of course .

Students from engineering background 30%&29% were only in favour of it .where as 34%&40% in final year, while 35% &30% up to the completion of course.

**Findings-** These findings are based on data analysis of research questions

- Both faculty and students strongly agreed on early educational background strongly affects later learning ability ,attitude/motivation towards learning communication skills.
- Government policy on ELT (Three language formula) should be reviewed well. As this do not provide equal opportunity to the students form Hindi medium form government colleges.
- Different Syllabus, Teaching methodology, Examination system, Evaluation Pattern, Grading in Central& State Boards creates discrimination among students for which students have to pay later ,during the course and in the end at the time of placements.
- At Secondary or Senior Secondary level when students opt for their stream. the purpose of English teaching Learning should be defined well(English for literary ,Technical/Professional purpose). This will clear their objective of studying English.
- 58% of students from different background replied in positive to the question that they do not have any knowledge of PC/BC. This shows that rather teaching English with prose, poetry, drama .defining the purpose of English at secondary or senior secondary level solve such problem.
- There are is an ardent need to review the present PC/BC syllabus at university as it is more based on theory and provides less opportunity for practical application of learned skills in day to day situation.

- There is a need to review the teaching/learning approach rather than focusing on content based and completing syllabus within a time, more practical /Communicative approach should be adopted .
- Professional/Business Communication should be taught from first year up to the completion of the course as teaching in one semester do not solve its purpose and students will get ample of time to learn and practice communication Skills
- Advance/Digital Language labs should be established to make teaching and learning more intrusting and result oriented .

## **Recommendation**

As per the above findings ,It is recommended that a time has come that we should review our education policy related to English teaching and learning ,as it do not provide equal opportunity to our students and they have to suffer at all the levels.

- English /Communicative English with language lab should be introduced at early stage of learning in government schools.
- Uniformity in Central &State Board in terms of syllabus ,teaching methodology, grading system etc.
- English offers vast opportunities to all. The policy regarding purpose of English teaching and learning in our education system should be well defined. Teaching same content to the students who have different career objectives will not work,
- Presently Professional/Business Communication is taught in one semester only ,which is not enough to learn and master communication skills it should be taught up to the completion of the Course .
- Communicative Approach must be adopted to get the desired outcome in teaching and learning at professional level .
- Teaching and learning is a two-way process, both teachers and learner perceptions towards the teaching and learning of English should be taken and reviewed seriously.
- It is also recommended that teachers are given enough opportunity for professional development so that they gain knowledge on effective teaching strategies that can be implemented at the classroom level,

## **Suggestions**

We must accept the fact that It is no longer sufficient to have first class degree from renowned institute, without communication skills it is difficult to get placed in a good organisation or to survive in this competitive business world, where everyone is struggling hard to survive.

- Teaching and learning Commutative English at an early age brings many benefits in terms of the development of general cognitive and social skills.
- The curriculum must be continuously reviewed and updated with the active participation of industry representatives.
- Colleges must carry out a quick evaluation of students' capabilities in the first year itself and tailor programmers to help bridge skill deficits.

- The interaction between the alumni of the institute, the faculty and the students should be seamless, Alumni should be encouraged to mentor students to bring them in line with industry expectations.
- Organise industry supported course and special lectures by industry experts to supports students interest in the importance of those areas.
- Create an eco-system where institutes can send faculty members to other institutions of higher learning such as IITs and NITs for giving them much needed exposure in those areas

## Conclusion

English competency is growing world-wide. It is expanding geographically to both younger and older demographics. We have seen the increased need for an English-proficient workforce for companies trying to grow on a global scale.

Over time, companies will require more people to speak English, and thus this will drive a bigger focus on English proficiency in education, both at the higher education level and among young learners.

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