A Study on the Effective Communication strategies to enhance the language proficiency for engineering students

Dr. L.MAYAVAN

Associate Professor
Panimalar Engineering College,
Chennai-600123

Abstract:
In order to succeed the competitive professional environment and to enhance the language proficiency, young engineering professionals are required to device and facilitate themselves with the required communication strategies. A large number of engineering students from rural districts in Tamilnadu are struggling to acquire a placement of their choice amidst the sound academic records, owing to their lack of proficiency in communication. Most of the young engineers flounder in the job market with average core skills and inadequate communication skills. Employers and hiring consultancies are weary of not being able to recruit the required percentage of well- trained proficient individuals. It becomes altogether the greatest need of the hour that these engineers to focus on their English Language Skills in addition to core technical knowledge. In such scenario, awareness of effective communication strategies can be of immense help to enhance proficiency in English within the stipulated time. Various communication strategies need to be employed in order to motivate the learners to develop the sense of responsibility in acquiring the language skills. This research study investigates Effective Communicative Strategies (ECS) employed by engineering students of five engineering colleges in Thiruvallur district in Tamilnadu. ECS are focused plans or techniques that learners use to assist their progress so as to enhance the level of proficiency. Strategy Inventory for Effective Communication was applied to 80 engineering students from five engineering colleges of Tiruvallur district. The main objective of this study is to identify the types and level of in the usages of ECS employed by these engineering students. In addition to that, it also aims to analyze the students' perceptions on the use of strategies in their language (English) learning. The study reported the preference of cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory and social strategies over to insufficient use of memory and affective strategies. The present study also revealed that these engineering students are totally unaware of the benefits of ECS and that some students are with lack of confidence, anxiety and withdrawn attitude in learning English.

Key words: Effective communicative Strategies (ECS), Engineering Students, Language Proficiency, Strategy Inventory for Effective Communication, Prospective aspirants.

Introduction:

Although much has been written on 'communication strategies' (CS), in the sense of potentially conscious plans for solving problems encountered in reaching particular communicative goals, there still remain large gaps in our knowledge in this respect. One area worthy of attention, and not totally clarified, is whether these strategies are applied and workable in writing as frequently as they are in speaking tasks (Allvar, Nabi Karimi; Aliabari, Mohammed, 2009). The process of learning has been gaining more importance over the products of language learning (Oxford, 1993). Consequently, Effective Communication Strategies (ECS) came to light not only as integral components of various models of language proficiency (Bialystok, 1978) but also as the ways of achieving learners' autonomy in language learning (Oxford, 1993). Communication Strategies occupy a very vital role in second language learning and enhancing the proficiency. Students' perception about the Communication strategies helps the teachers in understanding their wards and assists them in the process of enhancing the language proficiency.

This study focuses on various communication strategies that help and develop communication skills and language proficiency. With the consummation of English as an international language and its role as prime communication mode, educationalists are finding ways to devise communication strategies for enhancing language proficiency among engineering aspirants. It is imperative and mandatory to facilitate English language learning opportunities to the technical students as English language is recognized as a tool for admissions in reputed technical institutions. Many barriers are encountered by the students of vernacular medium in India. The overall success rate of the young engineers is adversely affected by barriers like untrained professionals, outdated methods of teaching, inadequate language aids and overcrowded classrooms. The prospective aspirants need to facilitate themselves with excellent communication skills in order to meet the highly competitive and demanding world of professional environments. Many recruiting agencies and reputed firms are hesitant to hire even the students who are good at academic performance owing to their lack of proficiency in English language and communication.

Engineering students tend to focus more on their technical core subjects in a general sense than to pay attention on improving their language proficiency. The educationalists affirm that it is altogether significant to device effective communication strategies so as to train the young graduates to use the stratagem to become successful in the field chosen. There is inadequacy and dearth of research on the use of communication strategies by engineering students in India. Therefore, the present study attempts to contribute in this area by investigating the use of ECS (Effective Communication Strategies) by engineering students in the Thiruvallur District in

Tamilnadu. The present paper accentuates engineering students' preferences in using effective communication strategies and their general understanding about ECS and their usefulness.

Communication Strategies- Meaning and Definitions:

The prominence of second / foreign language learning now is more on how teachers and learners achieve their goals, and not on the teaching techniques. Communication strategies are techniques that students use to improve and enhance their communication level and to become highly competitive in the chosen field. What and how a student think and act has become a matter of interest in terms of learning a foreign/ target language. The success rate is predominantly determined by the ways of utilizing effective communication strategies. A student might think about the process of understanding a text in a foreign language like "what does it mean? " Where will I get the meaning of the word?" Having got such type of difficulties in understanding, the student tends to take notes or ask a teacher or friend for clarification.

The word "strategy" is derived from the Greek word "strategos", stratus (meaning army) and "ago" (meaning leading/ moving). It defines the overall mission, vision and direction of an individual. The objective of a strategy is to maximize individual's strengths towards achieving or accomplishing the desired goal. Communication plays a crucial role in our day-to-day lives and is perhaps the most essential of all life skills.

Communication refers to the exchange of information between a receiver and a sender. Effective communication in the workplace should also be aligned with a plan and goal. Communication strategy refers to plans which are followed for a business to achieve its communication goals. They serve as a blueprint for communicating with workmates, customers, and superiors. Communication strategies affect a business by binding business objectives to its core values, resulting in better employee engagement and boosting their drive to do their work better. They also help a business by providing clear guidelines for its operation. It is important to recognize unintended nonverbal communications because these messages and dominant the message being communicated. If the person receiving a message hears one thing but picks up on a different message through non-verbal cues, they will likely default to believing the non-verbal message was intended.

Chester Barnard (1938) believes that "in the exhaustive theory of organization, communication strategies would occupy a central place because the structure, extensiveness and scope of organizations are almost entirely determined by communication techniques". He detailed that, "communication strategies are special ways of processing information that enhance proficiency of the target language" (Chester Barnard (1938)

According to M. T. Myers and G.E. Myers, "communication strategy refers to a special kind of patterning: a patterning which is expressed in symbolic form." For communication to take place between or among people, two requirements must be met: (1) a symbolic system must be shared by the people involved (we need to speak the same language or jargon or dialects) and (2) the associations between the symbols and their referents must be shared. They consider learners' use of communication strategies as conscious, purposely chosen and deliberate approach for enhancing proficiency.

According to Allen Louis "communication is the sum of all the things one person does; when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding"

Communication strategies have comprehensively been defined by Ordway Tead as: "Communication strategy is composite information given and received out of a learning experience. In this, certain attitudes, knowledge, and skills change, carving with them alterations of behavior, of listening effort by all involved, of a sympathetic fresh examination of issues by the communicator himself, of sensitive interacting points of view, leading to a higher level of shared understanding and common intention".

The study of the use of communication strategies gives insight into the cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective processes related to learning processes; while these strategies can be taught to the students who face difficulties in understanding so as to enhance their level of proficiency.

Review of Literature:

A lot number of researches have been done on communication strategies in past three decades. Joseph A DeVito defines communication strategies as inevitably and essentially relational in nature. Communication creates a relationship between or among the people interacting. It takes place in relationship and it affects the relationship, it defines the relationship. The way you communicate is determined in great part by the kind of relationship that exists between you and the other person. The communication strategy will be the roadmap for getting the project activities across to the target audience. This plan is to be seen as an essential tool of marketing and public relations management.

Pragyan Rath and Apoorva Bharadwaj (2017) explained the application of communication strategy which is the cornerstone of all communication episodes in managerial scenarios. In an Indian context, the application of communication strategy is all the more relevant as students have to grapple with multiple issues of resource deficits to humans. The inherent problem for the Indian workplace has been to mobilize people. Munter's grammar can give a structured paradigm to formulate their own professional dialogues for positive outcomes from convoluted situational dilemmas.

In view of communication strategies Duncan Angwin and Stephen Cummings expounded that the best way to engage and involve people is through pictures. Strategy Builder shows you how to creatively combine the best strategy frameworks to orient and animate strategy discussion and development in your team. This visual, interactive guide, with illustrations by Visory, uses real world examples and practical tips to help the learners. In a complex, fast changing world, where we are bombarded by words, numbers and reports, the visual-first approach to strategy provided by Strategy Builder is immensely helpful for inspiring and communicating a clearer vision of how to move forward.

Keith Coleman described that sufficient communication skills and strategies act as the basis of all our relationships and determine how we relate to people. From public speaking to presentations, job interviews, personal relationships, and daily transactions, there is no scenario where communication cannot help you achieve the goals you truly deserve. Being able to articulate your views and express yourself is critical in both business and personal relationships. Imagine having a head full of ideas but not having the ability to show or convey them. Effective communication gives you the power to put across your ideas assuredly and compellingly.

Wesche (1975) studied the learning behaviors of successful adult language learners in the Canadian civil service and asserted that there was more variety and quality of learning behaviors by those who improved quickly. Nambiar (1996) and Mah (1999) also found that Malaysian undergraduates used strategies in combination, especially from the cognitive and metacognitive strategy groups. This is an important finding because it helps us understand why some learners are more successful at completing a language task compared to others.

Need of the Study:
The workplace necessitates frequent communication between colleagues, human resources and management staff within the organization. Companies also communicate with outside entities, such as suppliers, clients and the general public. A communication strategic plan in business lays out how to handle the various forms of communication dispersed by the company. Understanding the benefits and purpose of a communication strategy can help you develop a roadmap to grow your company.

A communication strategy ensures that all significant information is dispersed to the correct people, both internally and externally. Having all people on the same page is essential to a highly efficient workplace. If some staff members are unaware of key information, they may be unable to complete their duties properly, or do work that they don't actually need to perform.

Without standardized communication strategies to external business contacts, you may have clients or suppliers who are unaware of policy changes, upcoming events and other relevant company information. Mind Tools also stresses the importance of correctly using a variety of communication channels to reach your intended audience, such well-run virtual meetings that include interactive activities such as web polling.

Young Engineering professionals are highly recommended to carry forth technical information in an acceptable way so as to perform best in the workplace. Contrarily, there is a dearth of communication strategies among graduating engineers to meet these requirements. Experts at all spheres found that there is a competency gaps in engineering education. This is really a fretful thing and we should be concerned about it as engineers play essential role in society. If they have been provided with or trained with some strategies or techniques to improve language skills in less period of time they might develop their skills.

Participants:
Engineering students of various branches have been chosen randomly for this present study from five engineering colleges in Thiruvallur district of Tamilnadu state. There is a mix of students from rural and urban background. Coordinators of different studies have passed on the information about the study and participants showed interest and cooperated well as the kind of studies is for ensuring their progress and enhancing their competency levels. The study focused the effectiveness of communication strategies that are to be employed among the engineering students.

Findings:
The questionnaires focusing on the cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective processes are distributed among the students in order to assess the participant's level of competency such as low, medium, or high in the usage of strategies. The study reflects that the majority of participants use these strategies to the most over to some participants who use communication strategies at the medium level. In the study it was also found that students of the selected colleges didn't have adequate skill of using memory strategies and affective strategies. These participants are medium users of memory and affective strategies and they employ such strategies occasionally. Affective strategies help learners to manage their emotions while memory strategies are meant to use of previous knowledge, reducing anxiety and stress. Memory and affective strategies play significant role in the acquisition of communication skills and strategies. Metacognitive strategies are the ones where the students try to overview and link the matter to be learned with the material they already know, and set goals and objectives for language learning, or learn from their errors, and evaluate their progress. But still, they use these strategies sometimes. Young graduates identified the communication strategies as beneficial and highly useful as the objective of the learners is to enhance their overall communication competency.

Conclusion:

The analysis shows that the majority of participants exhibited high to medium use of communication strategies. It displays the participant's preference for metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory and social strategies that place them in the line of high level learners. The study also indicated that these students do not use the strategies always amidst the students who make high to moderate level of use of these communication strategies. It reflects that they require strategy guidelines or training to improve their communication proficiency. It is also clear that the participants tend to select strategies based on their present need and task. Communication strategies influence the energy levels for change and improvement. Strong communications keep everyone focused on goals and priorities while providing feedback on progress. Effective communication strategies, systems, and practices have a huge and direct effect on organization learning and innovation.

The present study attempts to explore the use of communication strategies by engineering students in Thiruvallur district of Tamilnadu. Further research needs to be conducted in other universities and colleges before any generalizations can be made. Moreover, other research methodologies such as, retrospective interviews, think aloud protocols, diaries, or longitudinal studies need to be used to gain more comprehensive information about engineering students' use of communication strategies more effectively.

References:

1. Allvar, Nabi Karimi; Aliabari, Mohammed -Communication Strategies in the written Medium: The Effect of Language Proficiency (Bern Open Publishing, Switzerland, January 2009.

2. Bialystok, E.A theoretical model of second language learning. Language Learning, 1978.

3. Chester I Bernard, The Functions of the Executive, Southern Economic Journal. Vol.6, No.2, 1939.

4. Devito A Joseph – Communication Strategies, iUniverse, Inc, Bloomington, 2012.

5. Oxford, R. 1992/ 1993. Language learning strategies in a nutshell: Update and ESL suggestions. TESOL Journal, 2

6. Pragyan Rath and Apoorva Bharadwaj- Taylor and Francis, NewYork, 2017.

7. Rigney, W. Learning strategies: A theoretical perspective. In H.F. O"Neill (Ed.), Learning strategies New York: Academic Press.1978.

8. Wesche, M. B. 1975. The good adult language learner: A study of learning strategies and personality factors in an intensive course. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, Canada.