

Significance Of The Speaking Skill In The Workplace And Academic Contexts

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Abstract

The present technologically advanced global business has brought in the need for effective communication. A universal language has become mandatory to unite all forms of communication like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The English language has taken this role of eminence, wherein people of various nations and creeds use the language to communicate effectively. Of the four language skills, the speaking skill has taken a predominant role in effective corporate communication. Thereby this study aims to understand the importance of speaking skill in academic and workplace contexts. A survey questionnaire was circulated to 128 engineering students to understand their perception on the speaking skill. The survey shows that the students perceived their speaking skill to be – good.

Keywords Academic, Communication, Corporate, Speaking

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the heart of information exchange. It occurs in the social, academic and workplace contexts. It is impossible to imagine a world where information and knowledge sharing does not happen. Thereby, communication has become an integral part of human existence. In the professional context, workplace communication has become an inevitable mode of communication. Be it in the oral or the written form, communication in the workplace context is of utmost importance. In the workplace communication happens when information is



exchanged. Communication plays a vital role not only in the professional arena, but in the academic milieu also. It is not just the corporate employees who need good communication skills, but it has become mandatory for the engineering students also. This is because these students are the ones who will become the corporate employees in the future. Dupuy, Béatrice and Muriel Grosbois say “Communicating and collaborating with people across language and cultural boundaries and making innovative use of knowledge can help learners become well-rounded global citizens” (18). Global communication primarily happens through the English language and thereby this study attempts to understand the importance of speaking skill and the perception of the engineering students on their speaking skill.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication takes place primarily through written and oral means. Writing emails, letters, reports, memos, notices, etc are some of the documents which are frequently used in the workplaces. Oral communication happens in meetings, telecalls and formal exchanges. For all these communicative contexts, the four language skills are employed. The speaking, listening, reading and writing (LSRW) skill plays an inevitable role in language use. “In fact, the integration of listening and speaking with reading and writing will make learners good listeners, speakers, readers and writers so as to be able to communicate effectively” says Sadiku, Lorena Manaj 29.

The speaking skill is a productive skill and a prominent one in the social, academic, and professional setup. The present study focuses on the speaking skill in workplace context since, the skill is of utmost importance in the professional arena. Be it meeting clients or customers, conversing with business contacts, board and office meetings, or business conversation amongst employees the speaking skill plays a major role in communication. The speaking skill is a communicative skill that is essential for successful workplace communication. Due to the technological advancements and world-wide business collaborations, the speaking skill has taken immense value. Since English has become a universally accepted language for communication, speaking has also become important. Richards (as cited by Bahram, Zaitoon 432) “describes that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts”.

Speaking is not just uttering words, but expressing thoughts and feelings in an efficient manner. When speaking the speaker has to consider the following:



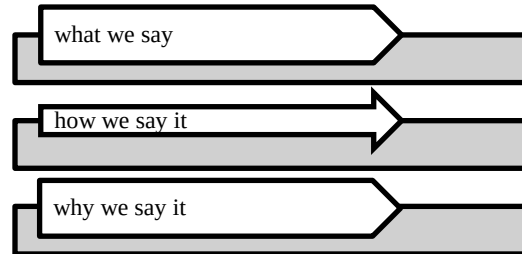


Figure 1 Aspects of Speaking

The speaker in the workplace context needs to decide carefully as to what to say, how to say, and why to say it. It is imperative that professionals speak and do presentations in an efficient manner. It is very important that an employee knows what to converse in an official setting. Also, the way the information is passed on is also important. Adding to this, the employees should understand the purpose of the conversation. In a board meeting, the nature of the conversation needs to be careful and appropriate. The members need to use expressions that are cordial and apt to the context. Similarly, when statements are made in the meeting, the members have to realize the intent of the discussions.

Speaking skill has taken a prominent role in the corporate realm. This has also brought out the need to inculcate effective speaking skill in the graduate level itself. Since the graduates are the ones who will move into the corporate arena, it is immensely important to educate them on the nuances of professional speaking. The engineering field produces lakhs of graduates every year, who enter the corporate arena with inadequate speaking skills. Their speaking lacks fluency and grammatical components and does not meet the standards of corporate organisation. So, this study aims to understand the perception of the engineering students about their speaking skill.

METHODOLOGY

The present study attempts to take a survey questionnaire about the perception of engineering students on their speaking skill. There were 128 respondents for the survey questionnaire titled "Assessing Students' Perception on their Speaking Skill". The respondents belonged to the age group of 17 to 19 years of age. The descriptive survey questionnaire

focussed on the perception the engineering students had about their speaking skills. The questionnaire was administered using the random sampling technique.

Analysis

Analysis of the survey questionnaire was made for the study. The majority of the students belonged to the Mother Tongue Telugu followed by Tamil.

Table 1 Mother Tongue

Telugu	101
Tamil	16
Hindi	4
Bengali	3
Urdu	3
Malayalam	1
Manipuri	1

The above Table 1 shows that more than three fourth of the respondents spoke 'Telugu'.

Table 2 Was English the Medium of instruction in school

No	4
Yes	125

For the question on the medium of instruction in school, nearly all the respondents replied that they came from English medium schools.

Table 3 How will you rate your English Language skills

Excellent	53
Good	72
Poor	4

The Table 3 points out that more than half of the respondents believe that they are 'good' in their English language skills. Nearly half of the respondents thought that they are



excellent in their English language skills. The above table clearly shows that nearly all the respondents were confident about their English language skills.

Table 4 How confident are you in Speaking English

Excellent	31
Good	91
Poor	7

The Table 4 shows that three fourth of the respondents perceived that their confident in their speaking skill followed by one fourth of them as 'excellent'. Nearly all the respondents said that they are confident about their speaking English.

Table 5 How would you assess your ability to do presentations in a dynamic and well organised manner

Excellent	30
Good	92
Poor	7

With regards to the question on presentation, Table 5 shows that nearly three fourth of the respondents perceive that they are good in doing presentation in a lively and organised way.

Table 6 How would you rate your speaking in group discussions

Excellent	45
Good	78
Poor	6

Group discussions play an important role in the placement interview process. Therefore, practice sessions on group discussions are generally carried out in regular English classes. The Table 6 shows that more than three fourth of the respondents perceived they are good in speaking in group discussions. "Much less than half the respondents said that their speaking in



group discussions. In fact, it is an acid test for students that show their team-working skills to the employer” say Arputhamalar, Aruna and Lakshmi R 4900.

Table 7 How would rate your public speaking ability

Excellent	38
Good	81
Poor	10

Public speaking is an important ability which the engineering students should possess. The above Table 7 shows the understanding of the students with regards to their public speaking ability. more than half of the respondents believed that their public speaking ability was good and a quarter of them perceived their public speaking ability to be excellent. For this too, the poor category was the last. A smaller number of students said that their public speaking ability is poor.

Table 8 The fear factor plays a major role when conversing in English

No	33
Yes	96

Fear is an important feature that plays a vital role in English language learning. Language acquisition theories too state that fear and language learning are related. The Table 8 shows that three fourth of the respondents replied that fear plays an important role while conversing in English. Only less than a quarter of them said that fear did not have any influence on their English conversation ability.

Table 9 I need preparation for presentations

No	19
Yes	110

The Table 9 shows that students need to prepare before doing presentations. Performing effective presentations is an essential component in the academic and workplace contexts. Engineering students do presentations on a regular basis, as a part of tests, viva etc.



For academic purposes performing presentations is mandatory and preparing for these presentations is also important. Most of the students replied that they need to prepare for presentations. This shows the importance of preparation before presenting.

Table 10 I have difficulty to speak in English with my peers

No	80
Yes	49

In academic and workplace contexts, speaking effectively in English with peers and colleagues is significant. The Table 10 shows that more than half of the respondents perceived that they had difficulty in speaking English effectively with peers. In the respondent group, less than half of them perceived that they have struggle in speaking English with peers.

Table 11 The English course is adequate to improve my speaking skill

Yes	8
No	121

English is taught as a subject in schools and colleges as a part of the syllabus. Table 11 expresses that most of them perceive their English course as inadequate to improve their speaking skill. It shows that more effort has to be given to the students to improve the engineering students' speaking skill. In the English classrooms activities pertaining to improving students' speaking skill.

Table 12 I need more help from the teacher to improve my speaking skill

Yes	113
No	16

Table 12 shows the importance of teaching and learning. Most of the respondents have replied that they need more help from the teacher to improve their speaking skill. The role of the teacher is significant in imparting the speaking to students. The table clearly shows the need for improvised learning methods to improve students' speaking skill. Pair work or group activities can be introduced in classrooms to cater to this need.



DISCUSSION

The present study focuses on the importance of the speaking skill in the workplace context and the perception of engineering students (future employees) on their speaking skill. Effective speaking skill is the need of the corporate world. So, it is mandatory that the new hires or the engineering should possess the effective speaking skill. As a part of workplace requirements, all the employees, including the new hires need to speak effectively with the clients, customers, peers, higher officials, etc. The survey questionnaire shows that the students perceived their speaking skill to be good in the contexts of group discussion, public speaking, conversing with peers and presenting presentations. The students also recorded the fact that the fear factor played a prominent role in speaking English fluently. The survey questionnaire also details that the students felt, the English course (offered in the regular syllabus) was inadequate to improve their speaking skills and that they need more help from teachers to enhance their speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

The present technological advancements and global businesses have augmented the need for a language that integrates comprehensive communication. The English language has taken a valuable position in the global communication process and thereby the current study on the speaking skill is of paramount importance. Sharndama C. Emmanuel, Yakubu Samaila & Yusuf Ishaya Tsojon 14 say

The demand for English Language all over the world is on the increase. This is because English Language plays different international roles. It is the language of globalisation, international politics and diplomacy, commerce, science and technology, computer and the internet among others. The increase in global interactions has stimulated the growing demand for proficiency in English language.

The study shows the importance of speaking skill in the workplace and academic contexts and the perception of engineering students on their speaking skill as - good.

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