LANGUAGE PROJECTS: AN INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN ELT

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Abstract: In the present global scenario, imparting the real time education and practical approach to the professional students is the need of the hour. This paper throws light on how the language projects can become great advantage for professional students. With an experience of guiding 470 projects, the author brings out and shares the practicalities in the assignment and implementation of project in detail. 'Exposure of learners to different language experiences will become added advantage' is highlighted in this paper.
Finally this paper gives an account of challenges faced by both teacher and learner in the implementation of language projects and further focuses on the achievement of success in the improvement of core communicative competence of the learners.

Key words: Challenges, Language Experiences, Professional Communication, Language Projects.

Introduction: To cater the needs of global technological upliftment, today's global student is expected to have more skills which can fulfill his aims and aspirations on a large scale. Especially professional studies like Engineering demand multifaceted skills of the students to reach the global standards on a wider spectrum. Teaching in the four walled rooms may not be serving the purpose totally for the learners. They need some extra inputs in addition to regular room teaching. In the present day scenario a student is expected to possess multi-faceted skills in which communication plays a crucial role. The effectiveness of communication and the response to it depends upon the way one seeks and produces information. Here candidate's approach should be convincing.

Being in language teaching of Engineering curriculum for the last 15 years, class room was always my laboratory to experiment innovative practices. The technique and methodologies were designed keeping in view of specific requirements of students at my end but are duly amendable and applicable across the world.

The expectation and demand of each year in all four years of B.Tech course is different and unique. The first year student who joins the course after +2 will enter the college with a little negligence towards language. Then the teacher is expected to brush up the basic skills like grammar, pronunciation corrections, introduction of phonetic sounds etc., highlighting the importance of communication for professional students.

In the second year, student will be seriously involved in his/her core subjects where the language usage and opportunity for development becomes very minimal as English is not there in the syllabus in most of the universities. When the student enters third year of engineering, he starts planning and thinking about his future and career. As student is going to be tested in his communicative proficiency in all the ways,

either in the higher studies or job placements, the student should be competent enough in acquiring required language skills. Here at this stage, student expects more support from curriculum, faculty and institution. "*Today only 25 percent of India's technical graduates and 10 to 15 percent of other graduates are employable at once' (Kiran Karnik, President, Nasscom in Business November 2007).This means 75 percent of all those who graduates even from tech-schools cannot be employed. This can be attributed to lack of soft skills and most importantly the inability to communicate in English.*" (Anindita Dutta, 2011).

Motif behind assignment of language projects: To master the art of communication, one needs little guidance at the initial stage and continuous practice thereafter. Engineering students need strong inputs in acquiring global standards in the path of making a successful career. With this backdrop, understanding the needs of the today's professional student, a novel approach of making the students to do communication projects, is taken up. Every year communication projects are assigned to the iii year Engineering students where it is the hands on experience for them to understand the professional communicative needs of the present world.

Apart from the curriculum based teaching, the learner requires practical knowledge in understanding communicative competency to handle organizational expectations efficiently.III year B.Tech engineering students of different engineering branches like ECE, CSE, CIVIL, Mechanical, Mining, Information Technology, and EEE branches.

Instead of giving lengthy theoretical hours in various topics of ELT like spoken skills, comprehensive skills, micro and macro skills along with soft skills, a practical exposure to the skills will give everlasting experience to the student. **A learning style in the ELF classroom is multidimensional. It includes not only the cognitive domain, but also the effective and psychological domains. It means**

that learning is neither essentially a habit formation (i.e behavioristic approach) nor exclusively a rule formation (i.e cognitive-code approach).(Mohammad Shaukat Ansari,2011)

Project Title: A project on "Professional Communication and Managerial Skills" is allotted with a view to give him hands on experience.

Methodology: Different small scale industries situated in and around Hyderabad were chosen.List of project topics is prepared (pre-task stage for teacher). Then students are divided into teams of 6 or 7 each with a team leader who initiates to be so. Then team leaders are asked to select a number between 1-8 (based on number of teams). So random selection of topics can be done and then allotment of topics is made.

- Then students are briefed with how to do the data collection and how and what to know also given in Questionnaire form.
- Students are given only name of the finished product(manufactured goods)   only. Teacher's role is minimal like monitoring and supervising following the general guidelines of UGC where the student- teacher contribution in the project should be 80:20 shares.
- Dead line was given for data collection and rough draft submission.
- Clear cut instructions given and students are properly motivated to do the projects
- Added advantage by language project is explained.
- Students should prepare a ppt on the project which is linked with their external language lab examination conducted at the end of semester.

Pre-Task: stage I: In this stage, students browsed in the Internet and collected the basic information like location of the industry, contact information like mobile number, landline number and email etc.

Then students contacted the industries to get the permission. After trying a few, one of them agreed to allow the teams to visit the campus.

Stage-II: Once the task of locating the industry is completed, students will come and collect the permission letters from the project coordinator duly signed and stamped by HOD.

Then the team should plan when to meet, where to meet and travel plans to reach the industry (problem solving skills).

Task: Stage III: Students are instructed to make out a plan to meet at a common place and should go in full dress code along with note books and pens. Then they approached the concerned officer in the industry to seek permission to go around and collect the data.

Then, teams have asked all the questions as instructed and sometimes more information than that of the situation demands. During this time students master the art of speaking and seeking required information.

Then they took the photos of the machinery (as instructed), manufacturing process etc and also a team photo with industry head as a proof to submit back.

Practical challenges faced by the students at this stage:

- Some of the teams were invited and received positively by the industry people.
- They have explained the manufacturing process from raw material to finished product very well.
- But some industries expressed doubts, asked for bribe, some didn't allow to take photos etc. But students solved every problem very well.

Post Task: Teams came back and reported to the coordinator and shared their experiences in the total process along with all the rough draft and relevant photos captured.

Stage IV: The team should compile and edit the data as per the instructions to bring it to the shape of project report. Instructions are given for how to compile the data under different headings.

Objective Achieved:

Team Building Skills:

Taking from the stage of team forming, team performing, students learnt a lot, like overcoming the differences, behavioral traits, planning, finding out solutions, sharing the work and going together.

Conversational skills and communicative competence:

In approaching the industry and taking permissions and reaching the location, in this stage, communication of both interpersonal and intrapersonal plays the major role.

Students came to experience how the miscommunication hampers the performance of the team.

Data collection and note-making:

While asking the information and collecting the relevant data students experienced how to do note making quickly, and extract the required information from the people.

Technical writing and information transfer:

Transferring the collected information into the report is a tough task but it is handled excellently by students. Then the team gathers to compile and edit information collected which is like arranging jigsaw puzzles as each part of their report is contributed by someone.

Basic skills of Language Learning:

- Spoken skills are improved.
- Listening skills are developed as they listen to people while gathering information.
- Writing   skills   like   sentence   construction,

grammar, punctuation, formatting, referencing is learnt by the students.

- Vocabulary building and development is done as student learn industry specific terms and vocabulary.

Presentation skills: The team will learn a lot while giving presentation in front of the stranger (External Examiner). Preparation of power point presentation different stages in oral presentation like Initiation of the topic, detailing, concluding along with brief account of team experiences in doing the project'- are achieved hundred percent on the scale of success. Though it is a team presentation, every team member should contribute for it. Then team will plan the presentation along with categorizing who should do what. Here it is eye witnessed that even average student from vernacular medium background explained about the project confidently. As they have watched everything with their eyes, they can easily handle their part of presentation and explain confidently about the project.

Other core skills developed: Leadership skills (at every stage of project it is highly experienced),Negotiation skills, Decision Making skills and problem solving skills are experienced along with improvement of core skills of LSRW.

Conclusion: Language project will provide the students, a hand on experience and exposes them to real life situation. The projects benefited students in the job interviews also as the extra effort on communication is appreciated by the recruiters shared by students who added communication project in their resume and are placed. Students explained about the project confidently as it is not a routine "**cut-copy-paste**" kind of thing, and they actually visited and involved in the total process. hence if properly guided and supported Language projects become excellent source for improvement of professional communication.

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