



Educating Teachers Teaching Technical Communication: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Technology has had a huge impact on technical communication. Communication technology has improved during the past three decades, moving beyond the telephone to include video conferences and computer-mediated, almost instantaneous information sharing. A few years ago, communication teachers only had one class of pupils at a time; today, they have multiple classes of students under their instruction at once.

The commercial and industrial sectors underwent the technological change that had begun during World War II in the 1960s. It is currently moving forward rapidly. Home internet connections, multimedia PCs for kids and instructors, video conferences for business meetings, and highly advanced electronic equipment are all used by people. The engineers now employ sophisticated tools for essays, imaging, and data processing.

How are technical communication educators supposed to stay current, much less stay far enough in advance to help students get ready for the workforce? How can teachers help their pupils develop the many technical skills they will require in the workplace? How might an institution facilitate in the preparation of teachers for the technological communication classroom? Does the syllabus of technical communication prescribed by various engineering institutions able to meet and respond to the constantly changing workplace?

This paper examines the necessity of teacher education, various opportunities in technical communication, and difficulties educators encounter when teaching the technical communication curriculum to engineering students. It concludes by outlining solutions that can help educators overcome these difficulties and reclaim their confidence in language classrooms.

Keywords : Teacher education, Technical communication, Technical English,

Introduction

Technical Communication is a consistent subject in engineering fields. But the subject has not got the proper exposure among the students as far as its market potentiality is concerned. The students tend to avoid the subject and take it as just a burden in the examination, besides teachers from plain English background are unable to teach the subject and justify it. The subject is just stuck to academics and it's the responsibility of the teachers of English Department to teach the course irrespective of whether they have the expertise in the particular subject or not.

In engineering fields, technical communication is a popular element. However, in terms of its business potential, the subject has not received the required exposure among students. In addition to the fact that teachers with backgrounds in plain English are unable to teach the subject and defend it, students have a tendency to avoid the subject and view it as just another burden in the exam. Regardless of their level of subject matter expertise, the English Department's teachers are responsible for instructing the course because it is strictly an academic subject.

Although it is generally agreed by researchers, teacher trainers, curriculum designers and teachers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) how important is teacher training in present day which can help English teachers grow professionally; but teacher education programmes in India seems to surprisingly ignore this crucial aspect of professional development. The programme designers do not seem to take notice of the fact that a methodologically incompetent teacher, even if linguistically aware, may feel handicapped while attending to the content learning problems of his/her learners. Although teacher education programmes in India seem to surprisingly ignore this important aspect of professional development, researchers, teacher trainers, curriculum designers, and teachers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) generally agree on the importance of teacher training in the modern world that can help English teachers grow professionally. The programme designers do not appear to be aware of the possibility that a methodologically inept teacher—despite being linguistically aware—might feel constrained while addressing the content learning issues of his or her students.

On the other hand, understanding and using Technical English may assist teachers better grasp their professionalism. Additionally, when it comes to correcting students' mistakes, guiding them to use the language accurately, selecting challenging and engaging teaching materials, communicating with

students fluently and accurately, giving proper instructions, getting involved in professional activities on a personal level, and being knowledgeable about current research, linguistically and technically competent teachers may be more successful than those who lack proficiency in the language and content.

Challenges : What's Difficult about teaching Technical Communication

Doing something is difficult if we do it with some doubt as to the eventual outcome. Depending on the nature and the degree of doubt, if we are having difficulty with something but expect from the nature of the task or the fact that others can do it that we will eventually learn to do it easily, we are having a transitory difficulty. The new teachers assigned with the task of teaching technical communication to the engineering students face transitory difficulties which is too apparent. If we approach a task with some scepticism regarding the outcome, it becomes tough. If we are having difficulties with anything but anticipate that we will soon learn to do it easily based on the task's nature or the fact that others can accomplish it, we are experiencing a temporary difficulty, depending on the type and degree of doubt. Technical communication lessons for engineering students present temporary challenges that are all too obvious for the new teachers tasked with teaching them. They include learning a new curriculum, discovering the needs of a new kind of student, making up assignments and grading them, learning the textbooks, gaining a feel for technical style- and as Maxwell Smart used to say, loving it. These are the difficulties we have when teaching any new subject; they are not in principle different from those we would encounter if suddenly asked to teach a new subject. Nor are they particularly difficult as such, to teach, but the teachers should be trained properly in the content, methodology and approaches, evaluation and assessment strategies, so that the training and experience they get from the training programmes can ease the difficulties of the new teachers.

Understanding a new curriculum, identifying the needs of a new type of student, creating and grading assignments, learning the textbooks, getting a sense of the technical style—and, as Maxwell Smart used to say, loving it—are just a few of the challenges. These are the challenges we face when teaching any new subject; they are, in theory, the same as those we'd face if we were unexpectedly asked to teach a new subject. They aren't very challenging to teach either, but teachers should be properly taught in the material, methodologies, and methods, as well as evaluation and assessment strategies, so that the new teachers' challenges might be lessened by their training and experience.

Teacher education in India

The number of educational institutes in the country has been growing at a healthy rate in India since independence, but teacher preparation in the country has not been able to keep pace with it. In fact, teacher education in the country has not had enough attention until recently. It is evident from the fact that it was only in 1995, that is twenty years after its establishment, that National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) got statutory status. There is even less to talk about the education or training for English teachers in the country. In the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2009), hardly anything is mentioned about the education of English teachers. Since independence, India has seen a steady increase in the number of educational institutions, but the country's efforts to prepare teachers have not kept up with this growth. In actuality, until recently, the nation's teacher education received insufficient attention. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) did not receive statutory standing until 1995, which is twenty years after its founding. Even less can be said for the nation's English teacher education system or preparation programmes. Little is said concerning the education of English teachers in the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2009). It goes without saying that there are programmes like the Post-Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English (PGDTE), Post-Graduate Certificate in the Teaching of English (PGCTE), and Bachelor of Education (B. Ed., English) offered by the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), the B. Ed. offered by the Regional Institutes of English (RIE), and some in-service programmes organised by the British Council for teachers of English. But if we take into account giving English teachers who are working to teach English to engineering students suitable training and education, they are insufficient. It is still questionable whether the typical Indian English teacher is aware of the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) or the Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA) and whether they can afford to pay the registration fees.

Absence of policies

It is notable that The National Council of Teachers of English exists in the US, where the majority of the population speaks English as their first language (L1). In contrast, there is no special policy for ELT and its practitioners in India, despite the fact that English is thought to be helping the country's overall development. There is no specific English Language Teaching policy at the state level in the country; English is taught as general English even to the technical students, and there are no specific teachers who would be trained in Technical Communication, according to a consortium organised in India in May 2007 by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Mumbai.

Even though there have been occasional discussions about overhauling the system (see, for instance, the 1989 "Report of the Curriculum Development Centre in English"), few ideas have actually been implemented into policies.

Absence of training

Since there are no separate policies for the education of English language teachers in the country, it had become necessity by the engineering institutions and universities to ensure that teachers who are selected to do the job are atleast having a minimum qualification of M.A, M.Phil or Ph. D Degree, are proficient in English and have the required language awareness to operate effectively in their respective classrooms. Unfortunately, very few pre-service teacher education programmes in India have been designed accordingly. It has become necessary for engineering institutions and universities to ensure

that teachers who are selected for the job at least have a minimum qualification of M.A., M.Phil., or Ph. D Degree, are proficient in English, and have the required language awareness to operate effectively in their respective classrooms because there are no separate policies for the education of English language teachers in the country. Sadly, relatively few pre-service teacher education programmes have been created in India in this manner. The National Curriculum Framework for organisational knowledge, or the knowledge of how texts are structured; grammatical knowledge, or the knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and phonology/graphology; textual knowledge, or the knowledge of cohesion and knowledge of rhetorical or conversational organisation; pragmatic knowledge, or the knowledge of the communicative objectives of the language user and the context in which the language is being used; functional knowledge in (Bachman and Palmer, 1996: 68). Any programme for preparing language teachers for the classes they must teach may fall far short of being effective if it does not incorporate elements from the language knowledge domains mentioned above — not only what Chomsky refers to as linguistic competence but also communicative competence as used by Hymes. The phrase "competence to convey competence" could be more appropriate (Thomas 1987) .

Hiring procedures in engineering colleges or universities

Talking about teacher education programmes for English teachers in India will remain incomplete without having a look at the debatable hiring policies for them in the country. Until recently, in most Engineering colleges and universities, there were English teachers from all sorts of academic backgrounds. They were only required to have Masters in English degree or a higher degree of either M.Phil or Ph.D in English literature . Their language proficiency, teaching methodology, subject knowledge never seemed to be a matter of importance and concern. Without discussing the contentious hiring practises for English teachers in India, any discussion of teacher education programmes for the subject will fall short. Up until recently, English teachers from a variety of academic backgrounds could be found in the majority of Engineering colleges and universities. They were merely required to hold a Masters in English or a doctoral degree in English literature, either of which was higher. Their expertise of the subjects they were teaching, as well as their language skills, never seemed to be a priority or cause for worry. It is obvious from the above fact that having trained in English Language teaching or specialised in English for specific purpose (ESP) was never a criterion in their selection. Since the hiring policies in majority of Indian states include employment of teachers with humanities background as English teachers regardless of their linguistic abilities, and subject knowledge, there should be some effort to ensure that the selected teachers are competent enough to handle the challenges in the classroom. At least a standardized test should be conducted to check the English language proficiency for candidates aspiring to join Engineering college. Such a test may encourage students to improve their language and communication skills before getting into the profession of teaching Technical English to engineering students. Unfortunately, the efforts in this regard have been far from being satisfactory.

The fact that they did not choose them based on their training in English language teaching or specialisation in English for particular purposes (ESP) is clear from the information provided above. There should be some effort made to ensure that the chosen teachers are qualified to handle the challenges in the classroom because the hiring policies in the majority of Indian states include the employment of teachers with humanities backgrounds as English teachers regardless of their linguistic abilities and subject knowledge. Candidates hoping to enrol in an engineering institution should at the very least take a standardised test to determine their level of English language competency.

Solutions

There are no simple answers to the issue raised in the preceding sections of this article Since the capacity to use the syntax, lexis, phonology, etc. of English is not what Technical Communication teachers should be limited to. Programs for teacher preparation must assist educators in recognising the aspects of a foreign language that differ from their own and guide them in incorporating local context into their language study and teaching. Teachers may be expected to encourage self-directed learning among their pupils if they have received the necessary training and education. Positive policy reforms may pave the way for incorporating these techniques into programmes for teacher preparation and making them socially and linguistically sensitive. The political party in charge at the federal and state levels, the selection of curriculum developers, the political motivations behind teacher hiring, etc., are just a few of the many elements that play a role in policy changes and are not directly related to ELT. However, we can only hope that all the states will accept the proposed NCTE curriculum and take the necessary actions to give instructors the linguistic and communicative proficiency needed to teach English at any level. Along with the aforementioned, adding language training modules to programmes for pre- and in-service teacher training may be a solution to the issue.. Language teaching techniques, methodologies, and strategies for teaching English for a particular purpose should be included in the modules for English teachers. English teachers may be required to complete the required modules in order to earn degrees like a Certificate in Teaching, a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Education, etc. or to be eligible for raises and promotions. However, it will still be up to teachers to use appropriate self-development techniques, which can be included in official training programmes, to increase their language proficiency in their particular sociocultural setting.

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