

Bridging Curricular Gaps: English Communication Skills

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Abstract

English communication skills are widely considered essential for professional success and social mobility. Though in higher education contexts and identifiable gap persists between what is taught and what learners acquire is a real-life situations. The study focuses on the curricular gaps and shows a way for a shift from rote learning to a learner-centric and more practice-based approach. Through a mixed method, it explores how experiential learning, contextualised material, focuses on employability and improves learning outcomes. The outcomes suggest that active engagement, vocabulary development, and self-assessment play an indelible role in harnessing communication skills. It adds to the existing domain in the form of curriculum reform and shows a few practical strategies to align classroom teaching with the real-world needs of communication. In Telangana, several undergraduate classrooms are common to find students perform well in written examinations, but fail to speak even a few simple sentences in English. This reality highlights the gap between formal instruction and actual language use.

Key Words: Bridging curricular gaps, English, communication skills, social mobility, educational institutions, localisation of content, teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

Curricular gap may be understood (Tiyara, 2024) in terms of the gap between what is expected to be learned and the outcomes that result. The reason behind this type of gap might be attributed to either the obsolete nature of curricula or their disconnect from the requirements of industries. However, such gaps may be identified through the process of curriculum mapping and feedback analysis. It refers to the disparity between the intended goals of educational programs and actual accomplishments. In other words, when students find themselves unable to apply the knowledge received from a class in real-life situations, the curricular gap takes place. This problem is quite noticeable when it comes to the subject of English communication in the context of higher education.

In modern times, proficiency in English is no longer considered merely a requirement for academic success; it is also associated with job placement, socialising, and working in international settings. Nonetheless, today there are numerous students, especially those who come from regions and semi-urban areas, who are not sufficiently prepared for this challenge. It begs to ask why. Another potential reason

could be the dependence on information-dense syllabi and examinations. Although this might help in theory, it does not focus much on the use aspect of language skills. In addition, lack of real-world experience with communication activities only adds to the problem.

The current study aims to explore these problems in more depth by analyzing the interrelationships between curriculum development, teaching techniques, and learner involvement. It will also assess whether localisation and experiential methods can help bridge the gap for English communication.

Literature Review

The theory upon which this study is based revolves around the idea of communicative competence. This focuses on how language can be used effectively socially and professionally (Hymes, 1972). Previous literature points out that English is considered a lingua franca due to its importance in communicating globally (Seidlhofer, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2010). However, critical theories also stress that English carries many political implications related to culture, and power relations exist in the field of education and employment (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994).

Studies from across the globe prove that English proficiency correlates with better employment opportunities. It has been pointed out that communication skills rank amongst the top skills that potential employers prefer in a candidate (Robles, 2012; Andrews & Higson, 2008). In the context of India, studies have shown that there is a gap between the syllabus taught at undergraduate levels and what industry requires, especially when it comes to rural and semi-urban areas where localised material and bilingual approaches are overlooked (Rao, 2019; Rao, 2010). Studies on industry-academia collaboration highlight that teaching report writing, conflict management, and technical communication increases employment prospects (Canagarajah, 2007).

Further analysis of the situation through a regional lens also indicates the necessity for change in the curriculum at institutions like Satavahana University, where soft skills and communicative competence have started being recognised as key factors in undergraduate courses (Satavahana University, 2020). According to researchers, experiential pedagogy, use of technology, and multilingualism can help connect the two extremes of conventional teaching and employability needs (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1992; Coleman, 2010).

Thus, the literature review shows that there is a global necessity for changes in the curriculum in terms of English communication as well as the national/ local urgency of overcoming structural obstacles in order to achieve effective learning outcomes. It should be mentioned that this double approach calls for a unified strategy that includes both global experience and the specifics of the local educational environment.

The aim of this research paper is to analyse the curricular gap in teaching English language communication skills and demonstrate an alternative way of effective teaching and bridging the gap.

Research Methodology

The current research will make use of the mixed methods research approach, where both qualitative and quantitative approaches will be utilised in order to achieve a holistic perspective on the curricular gaps in

English language communication skills. The qualitative method will involve interviews and analysis based on themes, whereas the quantitative method will involve the use of surveys and statistical analyses in assessing the level of preparedness of the students and the expectations of the employers (Creswell, 2014).

Sampling frame involves the use of undergraduate students enrolled in government-funded degree colleges, faculty involved in teaching English courses and finally industry representatives who hire employees and train them.

Data collection instruments will include structured surveys to obtain self-reported measures related to competence and confidence related to communication skills, semi-structured interviews with faculty and employers to discover gaps related to curricula and finally analysis of the curricula to discover any gaps compared to industry requirements (Coleman, 2010). Thematic coding will be applied to the qualitative data collected for analysis, where themes related to employment, active learning and local context will be used (Robles, 2012).

Analysis

Based on the results, it appears that at present there are significant disparities when it comes to the English communication skill level of students at the university. Students have demonstrated basic grammatical competence; however, they lack the confidence to use their abilities in practice to write reports and handle conflicts or engage in technical communications (Rao, 2019). As a matter of fact, the gaps identified through the analysis include the absence of industry-oriented learning and insufficient focus on experience-based instruction. Indeed, interviews with faculty members confirm the dominance of rote learning in the classroom, which limits students' ability to adjust to working conditions (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1992).

There is a considerable disparity between the expectations of employers and the preparation of students. The first ones repeatedly mention the importance of the development of soft skills and proficiency in English communication, along with flexibility in multicultural settings, whereas the latter ones claim they have little chance to develop their skills (Robles, 2012; Andrews & Higson, 2008). Compared to other regions and nations, the analysis demonstrates that global expectations emphasise communicative competence and multilingualism. In contrast, regional curricula appear outdated, failing to include digital tools and relevant content.

Discussion

The results obtained from this study indicate a clear disconnection between what students are taught in class and what is required of them in real-life situations. Although students are found to have some degree of knowledge about grammatical rules and structural aspects, they tend to shy away from engaging in English language activities such as presentations or written tasks.

For example, in an undergraduate class at a government degree college in Telangana state, students were able to answer grammatical questions during written exams but struggled when it came to introducing themselves in English. During another activity requiring them to talk about their daily routines, many of

the respondents switched to Telugu mid-sentence, not because they were out of ideas, but rather out of confidence issues related to using English.

This implies that although the problem might be seen in terms of language proficiency, the main concern lies in how little practice students have in putting their linguistic skills to work. It was observed in numerous cases that students and instructors alike tended to emphasise the importance of memorisation rather than interactive practice. Observations from classrooms showed that lessons are usually based on textbook explanations and note-taking. For example, in a lesson on writing letters, the students were required to learn the formats of writing letters without actually writing their own. Upon being assigned to write a letter to a company, they found it difficult to adapt the formats independently. Thus, methods relying on memorisation seem not to foster transfer of skills to other tasks and situations.

However, tackling this problem may require more than slight modifications to the syllabus. Indeed, it is high time that the process of teaching English was reconsidered. Incorporating tasks, discussions, and simulations may help make the learning process more interesting and useful. Furthermore, including modules dealing with such issues as report writing and correspondence at the workplace could be considered.

Through informal conversations with fourth-year students, it became evident that one of their problems with campus interviews was conducting a group discussion. One of the students said that even though they had been studying English for years, they “never practice[d] speaking in groups.” This fact can be traced when they participate in placement activities where they keep quiet but have ideas to share.

The second crucial element that came out of the research is that of context. Students who come from rural areas or multilingual families usually learn better with bilingual explanations and culturally relevant examples. Whenever the learning material connects with their actual experiences, students participate more enthusiastically. Whereas the classrooms that had some instances of bilingual explanations had a clear distinction in the participation rate. For instance, whenever the professor would explain the concept using the Telugu language and ask the students to answer in English, there were many students attempting to speak. Once in an activity, the students had to write about a native festival, such as Bathukamma in the English language. Since it was something related to their experience, they participated more actively and experimented with the language.

The technology could act as an enabler in such scenarios, but only if it is implemented properly.

The second important aspect that emerged as a result of the research is that of context. Rural students and those from multilingual homes tend to respond well to bilingual explanations as well as cultural examples. Anytime the information being learned relates to the real-life experiences of the students, they tend to get involved more actively.

In the case of those classrooms where there were some elements of bilingual explanation, the difference in levels of participation was rather obvious. For example, when the teacher provided an explanation in the Telugu language and requested the answers in English, there were a lot of students trying to participate. In one of the activities, the students were asked to describe a native festival like Bathukamma in the English language. This became quite motivating for them because they had personal experience with the festival.

Conclusion

The research paper explored the existence of curricular gaps in English communication. The results from the analysis suggest the role of English as a second language in education is widely recognised, but there seems to be an insufficient number of effective methods to help learners gain communication skills in practice. To begin with, this research demonstrated the need for additional activities to encourage learners to interact with the material. Merely covering the required topics cannot lead to desirable outcomes; instead, pedagogical strategies should encourage engagement, practice, and reflection.

In addition, the results show that curriculum design should be aligned with the demands of modern society. Specifically, it should include information about employability skills, consider the peculiarities of a particular cultural context, and provide constant assistance to both instructors and learners. Faculty training is especially important to facilitate change.

Finally, instead of treating gaps in the curricula as a constraint, educators should take advantage of this phenomenon and reconsider current practices. As a result, educational institutions will be able to train competent specialists who are capable of communicating effectively in both academic and professional environments. To sum up, improving English communication skills necessitates balancing global and local factors and theory and practice.

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