

# A STUDY ON INTERNET AND MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

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## **Introduction**

The Internet has become increasingly a crucible for world languages. This has direct implications on engineering education, as the Internet is central to various elements of engineering education. It also increases the global access to engineering education information, as under-served languages come online. Statistics indicate that the prime language of Internet sites is becoming increasingly regionalized, with the local dominant language being the first choice in language options. English is still strong, but it is becoming the second choice in an increasingly multilingual international community. The Internet, as an instrument of globalization, contributes to this process of recognizing diversity. This has clear implications for engineering education. Language will no longer be the prime determinant for access to engineering education based on traditional European structures because large, previously under-represented communities will gain greater representation. Furthermore, this expanded access to the Internet builds a new dimension in the education process in this era of globalization: by combining language education with technology education. This also generates a greater element of regionalization as these large under represented groups in Asia and Africa demand the skills required to operate competitively in the world. However, language still remains a strong barrier. Evolution of the online language population.

## **English as Global Language**

The process of globalization, powered through technology, initially enabled English to become the global language. Prime growth in Internet usage is coming from China and India, and while there is good English language proficiency in the latter, the preference is generally more for navigating in the user's native tongue. The Internet seems to be the new millennium's Tower of Babel, with increasingly more languages concentrated in the one type of technology. In this new millennium, people who speak English alongside other languages will outnumber those who speak it as a first language. There is also expected to be a language shift from those who speak English as foreign language (where there is no local model for English) to those who speak English as a Second English. English begins to penetrate new domains, such as China, where it does not already exist as part of the speaker's community. This has clear implications for education regarding decisions on the language of instruction, language training as well as Internet courses. This monolingual dominance of English instruction in some nations is brought into question at a time when employers are demanding new competencies, including communication and foreign language skills, and not just from engineering candidates in European nations. Although the focus will be decreasing on the English language, it will still maintain strong relevance as a secondary language for many people around the world. To this

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extent, English will be the linguistic bridge in international engineering projects. The importance of multilingualism for the global engineer is not confined to learning English. Multilingualism in an engineering course is increasingly focusing on regional communication skills, where the main languages from within that country's region are becoming just as important as learning English. European students, when recently surveyed, stated that they felt working in a foreign language was a necessary activity in an international career. The implications of this are apparent; the English language maintains extremely strong relevance now and in the future, particularly in acting as a connection for communication between two cultures. The English languages strengths will lie not in acting as a first language, but as a secondary language in international multilingual education. This also has clear implications for engineering education. As the profession of engineering becomes increasingly international, English language skills become very important to facilitate communication between cultures, emphasizing the necessity for English language and communication skills in engineering curricula.

## **Soft-skills in Communication**

A study report from Melbourne, Australia, stated that employers now seek graduates with skills beyond the standard paper degree; this includes an excellent level of skills in:

- Communication
- Decision Making
- Teamwork

In other areas too identified in the report included competencies in business acumen, marketing and public relations. Having the most knowledge was not as important as getting the work done in the most effective manner. Employers gave considerable value on graduates acquiring a diverse set of skills in differing work environments. However, the report also found that most graduates felt that they had gained analytical and problem solving skills, subject-specific knowledge, research and improved decision-making abilities through their degrees. Yet despite this, much fewer felt that their graduate degree provided:

- Oral communication skills.
- Awareness of the social implications of their discipline's developments.
- Management skills.
- Understanding of other points of view and other cultures.
- Confidence and competence to work in international environments. Notably, oral communication skills were considered very important in the graduates' new work environments, but this was in the face of the low level of oral communication skills imparted during their studies. However, neglecting learning opportunities can engender a shallow level of understanding in the graduate if he/she does not see the broader picture. The burgeoning importance placed on oral communication skills by employers has been echoed internationally for a decade or more and across disciplines. Knowledge and technical know-how are clearly important, but these must be presented with an excellent standard of communication skills, particularly oral. Indeed, oral communication and

presentation skills are considered one of the best career enhancers and to be the single biggest factor in determining a student's career success.

## **Communication Skills in English**

A review of literature indicates that oral communication has been identified as a learnable skill. Furthermore, communication skills development has been demonstrated through the use of various methods, such as class discussions and others. English and Communication Skills... While the study of famous speeches, learning oral communication theories and techniques from textbooks will still be beneficial, it should be noted that the literature has indicated that experiential methods have generally yielded better results than purely didactic means. Presentations: The student's knowledge base is augmented by allocating class projects for presentations. However, students will not place any great emphasis on presentation, and with it oral communication skills, if presentation and communication is not allocated a significant share for the exercise's marks. Furthermore, as much as many students dislike giving presentations, it is better that they experience a dry run in their education than to be suddenly confronted in the workplace. It should be noted that a recent Irish study found that 78% of a sample of practicing engineering graduates stated that were required to give oral presentations as part of their work, and quite often this was on a regular basis. Group projects and presentations encourage and enhance the interpersonal skills of the student members and should be emphasized early in the education curricula. This should be considered in particular as teamwork is recognized as a core skill in industry, and communication with team members needs to be effective. Peer Review: The necessity of the examiners and the Peer assessment has been shown to provide many advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include getting students to think about the exercise more deeply, recognize others' viewpoints and how to give constructive criticism to peers. Disadvantages include potential bias, reluctance to give low marks for poor work from their peers and the need for clearer guidelines. However, such disadvantages can be countered by utilizing group-based marking, rather than individual, increasing marking guideline specificity, and limiting the impact of the peer review exercise with regard to the overall performances.

## **Role-play**

As knowledge of communication theory does not necessarily parallel skills in practice, it is important to immerse students in similar work environments. Context-specific enactments, or role-play, can focus the student's attention on the differing types of communication required with various groups in potential future work situations. By engaging the students directly in active learning, they learn by doing. It is important to utilise pseudo environments to simulate meetings with clients/developers/peers/etc, as this will also allow students to interact with different levels of technical intensity, as well as engaging in nontechnical communications. Oral communication skills are needed not just for internal company matters, but also when dealing with external issues. Video Video/audio grading has been shown to dramatically improve presentation skills in students, with one prime example given where student presentations were filmed and then graded with dubbing from the teacher and a feedback sheet. Importantly, this provides relevant educational feedback to the student so that he/she can actually see and hear the positives and negatives of his/her presentation. Additionally, it is not transitory as the student's performance can be revisited. Technology Current technology should be utilized, or at least demonstrated to

### ***The Challenge***

the students, so that they are aware of what is in use beyond the university walls. The Irish study cited earlier found that instructors in communications need to review and update methods due to the rapid advances in communications technology. Furthermore, this Irish study found that practicing engineering graduates suggested that greater content for communication courses in undergraduate engineering cover basic MS Office applications (number 3 on the list, directly after oral presentations and keyboard skills), as well as other technical elements including Web page design, e-mail and graphic design. The MS Office suite includes Word, Excel and PowerPoint Presentations, and these were the three prime tools utilized in oral presentations by the graduates in industry. This gives a clear indication of technological elements that need to be incorporated into fundamental communication training for engineering students in preparation for industry. International Elements Communication skills training, while focused on the dominant culture of the host university's country, should also be mindful of variations in intercultural communication. With globalization becoming commonplace also with engineering work, graduates need to have an understanding of international communications. It includes aspects such as implicit language and cross-cultural idiosyncrasies, or risk being isolated, and is particularly relevant in dealings between native English speakers and non-native English speakers.

### **These four parts are:**

- The classroom must be conducive to communication and learning.
- Learning has to be relevant to learners' interests and needs.
- Both processes and products are important in the classroom.
- Learners must engage in active roles in the classroom.

The students those who are engaging as learners will help facilitate and stimulate effective and purposeful learning by their teachers. Involving the learners directly, in particular, will engender a stronger sense of responsibility in the future graduates that they can take beyond the university and into the work arena. This is especially important in engaging learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as it involves new vocabulary. The Fun Factor in Education There is not much fun but rather a great deal of stress in engineering education. Many students fail to turn up to classes because they ultimately become dissatisfied with the style of the lectures, strongly suggesting that the students fail to see the relevance of attendance and, at times, the relevance of the topic being taught. Many engineering students are not especially motivated to learn certain subjects, primarily because they have no real idea why they may need all this information. They also do not know whether all of the material is actually required for their career.

### **Team-teaching Collaborations**

Team-teaching collaboration between a subject expert and an English language teacher can be employed for the benefit of learners who will make the most of this integration. Overseas experience already indicates that the synergy from team-teaching can significantly improve the written and communication skills of most students, particularly oral presentations and report

writing, and that it generated a positive experience for all with a focus on students' needs and interests.

## **Assessment of Communication Skills of the Learners**

Communication skills have been identified as multidimensional and so it becomes crucial to classify how they will be assessed in the students' work. Furthermore, the particular communication skills required in a profession are usually poorly defined. One study identified those communication skills assessment must:

- Be formal so that it occurs at specific times and contributes to a student's marks.
- Provide feedback to be educational.
- Involve active participation by students in actual Communication situations.
- Tackle student insights so that skills are identified and developed.

Individual feedback is important for improving the education of students. However, there needs to be prudent identification and clear operational definitions of the rating dimensions so that the same standards are applied to all students: consistency and accuracy. It is vital that the student understands what is expected and what will be assessed ahead of time to facilitate education, learning and the generation of desirable characteristics, thereby delivering formative (feedback) and summative (evaluation) assessment. The oral communication element also needs to fit in well with the subject at hand. Student self-assessment was utilized in the study at Monish University, allowing for students to display insight into what was expected of them and their own strengths and weaknesses. The assessor would also provide feedback to this self-assessment. This would also give students the opportunity for their own performances as reflection of their achievement.

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