

**Factors Hindering the Development of Speaking Skill of Degree  
Engineering Students of South Gujarat: An Empirical Study**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1	Title of the thesis and abstract	1
2	Brief description on the state of the art of the research topic	2
3	Definition of the Problem	3
4	Objective of the Study	4
5	Methodology of Research	5
6	Results / Comparisons	6
7	Achievements with respect to the Objectives of the study	12
8	Original Contribution by the Thesis and Further Scope for Research	14
9	Publications	15
10	References	16

## 1. Title of the Thesis and Abstract

(a) **Title of the Thesis** : Factors Hindering the Development of Speaking Skill of Degree Engineering Students of South Gujarat: An Empirical Study

(b) **Abstract:** Communication Skills are an integral part of the success of any business organization of any class. The present scenario in which the importance of communication skills cannot be overlooked, it has been observed that the most of the students of the technical colleges of Gujarat, even though they are good at their content, they are labeled with “weak in Communication in general and speaking in particular” as they fail to communicate effectively in spoken form what they desire to in most of the cases. In spite of the repeated attempts made by the universities and faculty to make the students of the technical colleges competent in the speaking skill, the students still lag behind to communicate effectively. It is the need of the time to find out what kind of disturbances or factors exist which hinder the development of speaking skill of technical students of Gujarat so that the attempts to develop their speaking skill can be diverted to the proper direction. With reference to the above discussion and situation, it’s an urgent need to investigate and identify, “What is wrong with the system, faculty and students and where is it?” so that the possible solution can be thought of. With a noble intention of diagnosing the actual hindering factors responsible in the process of developing the speaking skill of the students of Degree Engineering colleges, this study - “Factors Hindering the Development of Speaking Skill of Degree Engineering Students of South Gujarat : An Empirical Study” is carried out. While attempting this, the students and faculty of degree Engineering Colleges of South Gujarat will be taken as samples and the data will be collected from them for analysis. The possible remedies for the same will also be suggested. The main objective of this research is to diagnose the factors that affect developing the speaking skill of the students of degree engineering colleges negatively and to ponder over the possible solution with reference to the present scenario because,

*“The ability to express an idea is well nigh as important as the idea itself.”*

- Bernard Baruch

## **2. Brief Description on the State of the Art of the Research Topic**

English language is known, spoken and read by large number of people all around the world. English has become one of the essential languages of the professional domain. Children in various parts of the world speak English Language in their school either as the mother tongue or as a foreign language. It is also observed that English language prevents isolation to the world and it is the key to reach out to the great treasure of knowledge offering the large opportunities to students to get employment anywhere in the world. Through English Language, it becomes easy to be in touch with Western science and technology and thus occupies an essential place in school and college curriculum.

Emphasizing the internationality of English language, Kachru and Smith remarked, “In order to be competitive, they have to be able to function well in multinational industrial enterprises, international trade, diplomacy, and scientific technological areas of expertise. They have to be innovative and contribute to the knowledge-based of the world. In order to achieve these goals, they need to be able to utilize the most widely used medium, English.” (178)

Use of computer and Artificial Intelligence in place of human beings and wide spread and use of internet require and compel modern engineers to serve the world. As a result of this change in the present scenario, engineers are expected to be the amalgamation of Technical, managerial and communication skills (English). The need of technical skills are catered by the Indian Higher Education system like, engineering colleges, deemed technical universities and self financing engineering colleges all around the country. Engineers, possessing good communication skills are placed remarkably in job markets than those who have comparatively poor communication skills. It is the irony of the present scenario that the engineering graduates with not so good speaking skill occupied the major portion of engineering society. If language is not a barrier, they can prove themselves but it is the fact that Engineers, English, computer and internet cannot be thought in isolation. Hence, Engineering Students / Engineers, without any doubt, require equipping themselves in developing their communication in English Language.

In an article published recently “How important is English language fluency for Engineers?” the basic reasons for an engineer to have English fluency are stated as,

- a. The fluency in English language is essential in one’s social life. It facilitates the process of building strong relationship as well as better understanding among classmates and peer groups.

- b. One has to know, understand and communicate very effectively to be successful in personal and professional life. In the era of, communication skills are the key to success in the era of liberalization, globalization and privatization.
- c. In the modern era, English language is an important bridge language of international business community, technology and research. Around 1.8 billion people of the world speak English and the number will rise.
- d. Employers look for the graduates with effective communication skills apart from sound technical knowledge.
- e. Having effective communication skills is considered as an asset by an organization. Professionals having good command over English language are set in higher level of standards than those who do not possess it. (Shree 1)

The then director of IIT Hyderabad, U B Desai, talks about the problem that the students are not able to speak English and that is not restricted to IITs but is the situation across the country and even in the other parts of the world like China and European nations (Verma and Bhattacharya 1-2)

Srinivasan Sundarrajan, the then director NIT Trichy admits that the engineering students face major problems regarding pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary and understanding sentence structures. The gaps can be clearly seen in effective speaking skill of the students. The report states that only 6.8 % engineers exhibit the English spoken skill or can respond naturally or spontaneously. (Verma and Bhattacharya 1-2)

“ Dozens of practical problems, which could be ignored when the subject matter being taught was the written language, suddenly surface when the subject matter is spoken language. (Brown and Yule 2-3)

Thus, this study is attempted to rectify the problems that Engineering students and Language teachers face in the process of developing English Language Speaking Skill

### **3. Definition of the Problem:**

Strong Oral communication skills are a part of every interaction in engineering work. It is no wonder that communication consistently ranks among top skills essential to the profession. In an article “Vital Skills in Engineering: Communication” Christine Nicometo says,

*“Engineering is an easy part; it’s the people that are difficult”*

By developing speaking skill as a regular part of everyday's curriculum, we can prepare our students to succeed, particularly in Gujarat. In this essential task, the teachers and students have to take care what Bygate pointed out in terms of achieving the language goals through speaking skill: Language Knowledge and Skills about how to apply / use this knowledge (Bygate 3). In the present syllabus of Engineering Colleges of Gujarat, communication skills development is concentrated in two of the semesters during their study of eight semesters and in most of the cases the average time devoted to the development of communication skills are 4 hours (2 hours Theory + 2 hours Practical Tasks) per week. Rest of the semesters in the college, they only concentrate on their engineering subjects. Along with this, there are other factors like anxiety, fear, the syllabus, the practice of English language skills inside and outside the college classrooms, the grammar skill, vocabulary, language learning environment, support from teachers and family members, the attitude of students, English teachers and technical teachers towards English as a language and subject, teaching methodology etc. have to be taken into consideration. Whether the students themselves are conscious about developing their communication skills in general and speaking skill in particular is a point to be verified. This study attempted to look in to the above factors from the perspective of engineering students and English teachers with reference to English language speaking skill.

#### **4. Objectives of the Study**

The present study was carried out to discover

1. the psychological factors hindering the development of speaking skill of degree engineering students
2. the factors related to the syllabus taught hindering the development of speaking skill of degree engineering students
3. the linguistic factors hindering the development of speaking skill of degree engineering students
4. the hindering factors related to teaching methodology used for developing speaking skill of degree engineering students
5. the hindering factors related to language learning / language acquisition process in developing speaking skill of degree engineering students

## 5. Methodology of Research

This study is the combination of survey and observation. The study is survey as the data was collected from students and teachers and it also included observation as the speaking test was administered on the engineering students to observe or discover the problems that they actually faced while speaking a few sentences in English language. The data was collected from students and teachers using a questionnaire in a Google forms. Questionnaire was administered among Degree Engineering Students of both Government Engineering Colleges and Self Financed Colleges of South Gujarat. Questionnaires were also administered among the English teachers of these colleges. A speaking test was designed for engineering students who had already studied English in their first or second semester to investigate the problems that they actually were facing while speaking English in normal situation. The rubric was also attempted to analyse the data collected from speaking test. The data of the questionnaire was analysed in tabulated and graphical forms using excel programme. The 10% of second year students of degree engineering colleges of south Gujarat had been selected to be studied in the present research. All three Government Engineering Colleges were selected to collect the data using questionnaire through Google form. As the number of self financed colleges was large, eight representative self financed colleges were selected based on geographical locations across the south Gujarat. 200 degree engineering students who had completed studying the English were selected as sample for speaking test. The English teachers of Degree Engineering Colleges across South Gujarat were selected for data collection through questionnaire.

Data analysis of Students Questionnaires had been done with respect to following variables.

1. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of **GEC students studied in Vernacular medium** at School Level
2. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of **SFI Engineering students studied in Vernacular medium** at School Level
3. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of **Male Engineering students studied in Vernacular medium** at School Level
4. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of **Female Engineering students studied in Vernacular medium** at School Level

5. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of **Engineering students studied in Rural Area in Vernacular medium** at school level
6. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of **Engineering students studied in Urban / City Area in Vernacular medium** at school level
7. The major factors hindering the development of speaking skill of Engineering students studied in **English Medium** at School Level

## **6. Results / Comparisons**

### **Findings of Students' Responses**

The data of the study were analysed into seven different categories (Govt. Engineering College Students, Self financed College Students, Students from Urban Background, Students from Rural Background, Male students, Female Students and The students studied through English medium at school level) as stated in the previous section. The major findings of the study have been presented here.

The engineering students were very well aware about the importance of “English Speaking Skill”. The students of all categories (except urban background and English Medium) felt that “to develop their speaking skill” is difficult / very difficult task. All students confessed that they had fear of making mistake when they tried to speak English. The engineering students (except those who studied in English medium) accepted that they had feared that “others would laugh on their mistakes if they tried to speak in English.” All types of students stated that they felt fear/hesitation if they were invited to speak before the class. All Engineering Students considered English Language Speaking Skill as important as their other technical subjects. The Engineering students did not agree to the given statement that “If a student has studied in Gujarati / Hindi / other Medium School, he/she cannot speak.” The Engineering students also did not agree to the given statement that “If a student has studied in rural / Village School, he/she cannot speak English.” The students confessed that Listening skill is practiced maximum in the Class by the students and speaking skill is minimum practiced in the class by the students in the process of developing their English Language Skills. The students of all categories were of the opinion that the present syllabus of communication skills can help them develop their communication skills. The Majority of the students (except those who studied in English medium) did not get the chance to speak in the classes of 60 minutes. The Engineering students even did not get enough opportunity to communicate in 2 hours of Lab / tutorial sessions. Those who confessed to have got the opportunities got it for

less than 5 minutes in the lab hours (once a week). There is no formal examination for listening and speaking. Out of the language lab activities, only Group Discussion and Presentations were done for more than one time in Lab sessions. The data analysis of the resources that they use for developing their vocabulary brought out the fact that engineering students do not use extra sources apart from Text books and Class lecture to learn new words consciously. Among all grammatical points, majority of the students confessed to have face problems in using grammatical knowledge in real life situation, (Tenses Voices, Prepositions, Direct-Indirect, conjunctions). Majority of them faced problems in using Tenses. The engineering students get the chance to listen to the English Language for less than an hour in a day. The students stated that their family members hardly (not at all or rarely) speak English with them. Only a few students (15% in GEC and 7.71% in SFI) said that their all the teacher uses only English Language while teaching their subjects. The students use no other sources except Class Lectures and teachers in the college to develop their listening skill consciously. Students don't manage to read anything except Text Books to develop their reading skill consciously. The students felt good and encouraging when their teacher corrected them on the spot about the mistake that they made while speaking in the class. The Students did not get any person in the college or at home with whom they could practice English Language Speaking Skill. A few of them (English Medium and Urban students) grabbed the opportunities to speak with teachers or friends. Teachers in the college talk about improving English Language Speaking inside or outside the class. The students got the chance to speak for less than 20 minutes in a college in a day. The students got the chance to speak English for less than 20 minutes at home. To more than 50.00% students, the normal speaker of English must have the following qualities if they want to become Normal English Language Speaker. (Expectations)

- must speak with confidence
- must not have fear while speaking
- others must be able to understand
- must have correct pronunciation

Majority of the students recommended that the subjects should be there in other semesters too. Comparative analyses between GEC and SFI, Urban and Rural School students, Male and Female students have also been attempted.

### **Findings of English Teachers' Responses**

Majority of the teachers (68.00%) felt that developing speaking skill of their degree engineering students was difficult / very difficult task. They confessed that Majority of Degree Engineering Students (60.00%) understood the importance of Speaking Skill. 92.00% teachers observed that Students felt the fear / hesitation when they were invited to speak in front of class. 96.00% teachers observed that students had fear of committing mistakes when they tried to speak in English. The majority of teachers (80.00%) admitted that students had the fear that “others will laugh at / comment on their mistake when they try to speak in English and they hesitate to speak.” 52.00% teachers were of the opinion that the students of their colleges did not consider English Language Speaking Skill as important as their other technical subjects (which is in contrast with students' opinion). To the statement “The other teachers teaching technical subjects in your college believe that English Language Speaking Skill is as important as their other technical subjects”, 44.00% teachers couldn't decide or ignore to give the opinion. 32.00% teachers did not consider the above statement true. It means that the teachers teaching technical subjects still do not consider the speaking skill as important as the other technical subjects. This attitude passes normally to the engineering students as the students are in contacts with them for most of the time. English teachers believed that vernacular medium of the students can never be hurdle in developing their Speaking skill. They can speak English too. Only 16.00% English teachers confessed to have taught only in English language in their classroom while teaching. Majority of them use both - English and vernacular- the languages. The engineering students (as 76.00% teachers said) use both – English and vernacular languages- in class to answer the questions. Only 04.00% teachers claimed that students use only English language while answering the questions. The English teachers observed that the engineering students normally talk among themselves in vernacular language normally inside / outside the class. They do not use English language. Only 24.00% of the teachers confessed that they talk only in English outside the class. Rest of them use other languages along with English. According to the English Teachers, the other teachers of engineering colleges teaching technical subjects do not talk to the students in English outside the class. 44.00% English teachers didn't want to give their opinion on this statement. 60.00% teachers said that the engineering students did not make conscious attempt to develop their speaking skill. Majority of teachers confessed that students come to them to take the guidance for developing their English speaking skill. Language teachers sometimes use audio visual aids during their English classes and not frequently. Only 20.00% teachers

confessed to have both – language lab and software. Rest don't have. The teachers stated that the engineering students do not read other reference books / material except the texts/ material prescribed in the syllabus. Majority (64.00%) of the teachers said that they can develop and give the kind of quality in speaking skill that an engineer requires even with the present syllabus. When asked to divide the content of syllabus with reference to four language skills, majority expressed that the syllabus can give the students practice of listening (through lecturing) and writing skills at maximum. They read academic books. Speaking skill has hardly been addressed in the present syllabus. All the teachers recommended the increase in lecture and Lab hours for developing speaking skill of engineering students.

All the teachers confessed that the maximum students face problems in the use of “Tenses” from all the grammatical points (Similar to the students' responses). Almost all the language teachers use the various techniques to develop their vocabulary depending upon the level of the students they get. The majority of language teachers (56.00%) do not have any special training for English Language Teaching. The language teachers of engineering colleges admitted that they are using combination of various activities, methods and techniques to engage the students in language learning task. Most of the teachers (80.00%) do not correct the mistakes of the students on the spot with a purpose of not discouraging them from speaking. They correct them later on. It was not possible for them to use a single method or technique in such a heterogeneous class so they use amalgamation of various methods and techniques of English Language Teaching. All recommended the communication skills in English to be the part of other semesters too. Major factors, according to the teachers, affecting the speaking skills of the engineering students are:

- Fear of committing mistakes
- Lack of grammar knowledge
- Lack of confidence
- Phobia, Shyness
- Insufficient live contact with English
- Examination system that kills spirit of language learning
- Surrounding ( friends' and relatives' negative remarks)
- Students lack vocabulary
- No exposure to use English language

- Only one faculty (faculty of English) keeps speaking in English
- Students' attitude ( which they receive from seniors and other immature staff members) regarding communication skills / English subject
- Teaching hours are not enough, Lack of reading habit
- Mother tongue interference
- Students coming from vernacular background
- The background in which they spend their most of time apart from family, Institutional atmosphere, Faculties
- Hesitation to speak English
- Fear of teacher
- Giving up too soon.
- Desensitized approach to language after 10th std as science students
- Tedious syllabus
- Technical teachers' attitude towards language

The teachers of language in engineering colleges wanted to add or remove certain points in/from the syllabus. They suggested that Viva Exam for students to assess their speaking skill should be there at regular intervals. More Practical Activity Sessions should be organised for students. The literature pieces Novels, short stories, plays etc. should be added in the syllabus. Students should be guided to use applications for language learning. Units to enrich students' vocabulary should be added. More emphasis on speaking skill exercises should be given in the syllabus. They suggested that grammar units should be there in the syllabus but not the basic one. It should be of some higher level. There must be a scope for content writing, expression and explanations leading to creative writing. The syllabus should be designed in such a way that it turns out to be helpful in future with reference to the global scenario. They recommended adding Stress rules, poem recitation, telephonic conversation, meeting, public speech, anchoring, famous speeches and You Tube videos to be the part of syllabus. Teaching techniques are also needed to be changed. Some teachers advised to eliminate phonetics from syllabus.

### **Speaking Test: Findings**

- The students of Degree Engineering College do not have any problem in understanding the question asked.

- Only 26.50% of the total students were speaking English confidently. Rest of them were lacking confidence while speaking / answering questions.
- Majority (69.50%) students were observed facing problem in finding / recalling words in English for their thoughts while speaking.
- Most of the students (72.00%) did not face any difficulty in getting thoughts about what they were speaking.
- 61.50% students were used group of words to express themselves instead of complete sentences.
- Only 11.00% students expressed their desire to use their mother tongue when asked questions in English. Rest of them tried to answer the question in English Language in whatever English they knew.
- 34.00% students used Gujarati / vernacular words while speaking English language. Majority of them did not use any Gujarati words in their speech. They try to speak in English.
- Only 17.50% students did the exact translation from mother tongue copying the sentence pattern of their mother tongue but the majority of the students (82.50%) were aware of the sentence structure (S+V+O) of English language while speaking.
- The pronunciation of all the students was intelligible with reference to the local context. The researcher could understand the pronunciation.
- Majority of the students repeated the words, phrases and sentences to correct themselves. (positive sign)
- Majority of the students (60.50%) found problems in using tenses (Subject – Verb Agreement) in answering the questions.
- 73.50% students did not know how to use the apostrophe ‘s’ (possessive) while speaking English.
- Almost half of the students 43.00% could not use the pronoun (for female) correctly while speaking in English. (Particularly “she”)
- 39.50% students could not use the preposition correctly. Majority managed to use them correctly.
- All the students managed to use simple sentence structures in their speech.
- Majority of the students (52.50%) did not use compound sentence structures in their speech. (not using coordinating conjunctions)

- Very few (14.00%) managed to use complex sentence structure in their speech. Rest did not.
- Most of the students (69.00%) took long pauses while answering questions or speaking English as they might be searching for the thoughts or the appropriate words in English.
- Almost all the students manage to communicate their message through words or group of words or broken sentences.
- There was not a single student who did not speak anything. Everybody answered and attempted to communicate his/her ideas.
- When assessed by the prepared rubric, the speaking skill of majority of engineering students is found to be in average category.

#### **7. Achievement with respect to the Objectives of the study**

In the light of the stated objectives, the study is concluded with the discovery of the following factors that actually hinder the teaching and learning of speaking skill of degree Engineering Students in South Gujarat.

#### **The psychological factors hindering the development of speaking skill of students**

The psychological factors are more dominant among all the other factors that affect the degree engineering students of South Gujarat. Anxiety is a “Psychological phenomena, a state of apprehension, a strange fear that is only indirectly associated with an object” (Scovel 134). “It may negatively affect acquisition process of language and has always been highly influencing variables in all of psychology of education (Horwitz 124)

To be particular, the following psychological factors that affect the process of developing English language speaking skill are discovered.

- The students feel that it is difficult to develop their speaking skill.
- The students feel fear of committing mistakes while trying to speak English.
- The students are fearful about being laughed at or being commented on their mistakes by others when they attempt to speak in English.
- The Engineering students feel fear/ hesitation when they are invited to speak before the class.
- Majority of degree engineering students feel that a normal English language speaker of English must have confidence, must not have fear, must have correct pronunciation and must be understood by others. They think that once they attain these qualities, they will try to speak English. As a result they hesitate to speak out of fear.

### **The factors related to the syllabus taught hindering the development of speaking skill of students**

- The students and teachers both have no problem with the content of the syllabus as such. Still the part that they really wanted to emphasize was practical part in which they find that the lab activities are to be increased in variety and repetition of the language lab activities is still be emphasized.
- The lecture and lab hours (2 + 2 hours/week) assigned to develop English Language skills are not enough to develop the speaking skill of degree engineering students.
- Speaking is the skill that is minimum practiced in the class by the students in teaching learning process.
- The students recommended that the language subject should be there in other semesters too.

### **The linguistic factors hindering the development of speaking skill of students**

The students are found with serious problems in understanding the grammar units and more than that they are not aware of how to apply these grammatical units in real life situation.

- The degree engineering students cannot use Apostrophe's' and the personal pronoun appropriately.
- The degree engineering students cannot use tense correctly in their use of simple sentences.
- They try to use simple sentences but they hardly use conjunctions to form compound or complex sentences.
- The degree engineering students do not make conscious attempts to learn the new words from other sources. Nunan also emphasised vocabulary in the process of learning language saying that the initial stages of language learning should be devoted almost entirely to vocabulary work. (142)
- The students cannot recall words for their ideas while speaking in English.

### **The hindering factors related to teaching methodology used for developing speaking skill of students**

- The students do not get the enough opportunities to speak in "Communication Skills Lectures" classes of 60 minutes.

- They even do not get enough opportunity to communicate in 2 hours of Lab / tutorial sessions.
- The students get the chance to listen to the English Language for less than **an hour** in a day in the college.
- The teachers of all subjects use the combination of English and other languages while teaching their subjects
- No language lab and software in the colleges

### **The hindering factors related to learning / acquisition process in developing speaking skill of students**

- The students' family members hardly speak English with them in a day.
- There is no formal examination of listening and speaking skills.
- The students do not use extra sources apart from Text books and Class lecture to learn new words consciously.
- The students use no other sources except Class Lectures in the college to develop their listening skill consciously.
- Students don't manage to read anything except Text Books to develop their reading skill consciously.
- Students do not get any person in the college or at home with whom they can practice English Language Speaking Skill.
- The students get the chance to speak for less than 20 minutes in a college in a day.
- The students hardly speak English Language at home.

### **8. Original Contribution by the Thesis and Further Scope for Research**

No one has attempted such kind of extensive study on Engineering Students in south Gujarat region to find out the factors that really affect teaching and learning of English Language speaking skill. With these factors discovered with reference to speaking skill of engineering students the further research can be carried out on,

1. The syllabus can be attempted for developing the speaking skill of the students based on the findings discovered in this research.
2. Further detailed researches can be carried out on a particular factor which hinders the development of speaking skill the most.

3. Further research on designing Classroom Activities for developing the speaking skill can be done with respect to the most dominant factor / factors discovered
4. Language Teachers can be imparted training keeping in view the findings of this study to make them more effective and innovative in their teaching of language skills.

## **9. List of Publications**

1. “A Study On Vocabulary Development Strategies Used By EFL Learners Of Gujarat Technological University” Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL), Vol.3.3.2015 (July-Sep) , ISSN 2395-2636 (Print) 2321-3108 (Online)
2. Language Anxiety in Acquisition of Speaking Skill among Engineering Undergraduates, IJRAR- International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews, VOLUME 4, ISSUE I, JAN. – MARCH 2017, e ISSN 2348 –1269, Print ISSN 2349-5138, pp. 39-42, <<http://ijrar.com/>>
3. Evaluating Syllabus of Communication Skills From Degree Engineering Students’ Perspective, Towards Excellence: An Indexed Refereed Journal of Higher Education, DEC, 2017. VOL.9. ISSUE NO. 3 ISSN No. 0974-035X, pp. 61-68 <[www.ascgujarat.org](http://www.ascgujarat.org)>

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