

IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING TECHNICAL VOCABULARY BY THE STUDENTS OF POLYTECHNICS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract: Words are of utmost importance in any form of communication in any given language. Mastering English also can be done only by gaining competence over its vocabulary. Indian students in general, students of Technical Education in Andhra Pradesh in particular find it difficult to master English vocabulary. Moreover, there is a lot of difference in English to be learnt by a student of general course and a student of technical course. A technical student is expected to prepare a project report, present papers, write for journals and do a lot for which he requires a lot of technical vocabulary. Unfortunately a technical student in Andhra Pradesh is unable to get the required technical vocabulary as it is not given importance in the curriculum. This paper addresses the problems faced by polytechnic students in learning vocabulary, the short comings of materials, methods to follow and the other related issues.

Key words: (words, vocabulary, technical students, curriculum)

The fact is that while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Wilkins. (1972) Vocabulary is the essence of any given language. Oxford advanced Learner's dictionary (OALD) defines Vocabulary as

“Total number of words that make up a language”

“Body of words known to a person or used in a particular book, subject, etc.”

“List of words with their meaning, esp one which accompanies a text in a foreign language”.

It is undeniable the fact that any language can be learnt only by mastering its vocabulary. Learning English, in that case, can be effective only by gaining competency on English vocabulary. Going by the definitions on vocabulary given by oald or any other source, the only common word that appears in any description is words. In other words, vocabulary is nothing but 'words'. To put it in an easier form, teaching vocabulary refers to teaching of words only. This paper makes a humble effort to explore the easiest and most effective ways to teach vocabulary to all the student community in general and to polytechnic students in particular. The word, 'word' is defined from different perspectives. Some of them are: As Nitin Paul Mehta (Hindustan times, July 7, 1991) rightly observes, “Words are vehicles which do diverse duties for us. They are vital to our existence. We can't think without words. Words are thoughts, we can't plan, draw conclusion, draft agreements, judgments, say our prayer, or compose music without words. Words are packed with meaning and persuasive power. There can hardly be any meaningful relationship, beautiful or ugly, close or casual without words “. Word is the vehicle of thought. There are different meanings for a word, basing on its function and form: conceptual meaning, referential meaning, grammatical meaning, and connotative meaning and so on. Hence the definition of a word also can be given basing on its aspect.

'Word isany sequence of letters (and a limited number of other characteristics such as hyphen and apostrophe) bounded on either side by a space or punctuation mark. The orthographic definition says that word is the smallest meaningful unit of language. Bloomfield defines it from semantic point of view and says that the word is a minimal free form, i.e. the smallest form that has a meaning when standing on its own. Whereas McCarthy defines that a word is a free meaningful unit of language, must contain at least one potentially free standing morpheme. Importance of learning English vocabulary: The core content of any language is its vocabulary. Acquisition of a language will not take place without comprehension of vocabulary. Language is the means of communication. The data from Wikipedia.org site says that there are approximately 6909 living languages in this world. Mandarin is the largest spoken language having 845 million native speakers. Spanish stands second largest spoken language with 329 million native speakers. The third place is occupied by English with 328 million native speakers despite the fact that English stands in the third position in the list of native speakers, it is considered to the 'lingua franca', the language of masses and it is considered to be the universal language. Mandarin and Spanish, on the other hand, are not considered 'lingua franca'. There is innumerable number of reasons why English gained its popularity all over the world, but not the other counterparts. One strong reason is that the British Empire established its colonies in almost all continents and spread the use of English. Indians also have inseparable bond with English. The British ruled India for over two centuries and Indians were forced to learn English. English has become inescapable reality in Indian life. Presently, English enjoys the status of official language in India. All the important transactions and proceeding take place in English

only in India. It is the library language. India is known to have 1645 regional, local, languages and English serves as the link language among the speakers of those languages. English has become the most essential part of Indian culture and social life. Hence it has become almost compulsory for Indians to learn English, in addition to the mother tongue. In other words English has become second mother tongue of Indians. It's the source of employment and also a passport for livelihood. It is unarguably important, now, for Indians to learn English for their educational, employment related, social and official purposes. Learning any language, English in particular, can be effective and systematic, if learnt its vocabulary. English vocabulary is an amalgam of many languages such as French, German, Russian, Celtic etc, including Indian languages like Hindi, Telugu and etc. Hence teaching English vocabulary can be very challenging and interesting job of all. Teaching / Learning vocabulary for Technical students: Learning vocabulary for general purposes is totally a different domain and learning technical vocabulary is another domain altogether. English for science and Technology (EST) focuses on the teaching methodology of English for students of science and technology. Teaching vocabulary for technical students is different from teaching vocabulary for students with general purposes. The technical students need to attend group discussions, Just-a-minute (JAM) sessions, prepare technical writings, present research papers, write reports, conduct experiments and get inferences etc. which demand technical vocabulary. English Taught in Polytechnics in Andhra Pradesh: State board of technical education and training (SBTET), Andhra Pradesh provides diploma level education under different core branches like Electrical, Mechanical, Civil etc. and other special engineering diploma courses like Special Diploma in Bio Medical Engineering. Presently there are more than 100 government and more than 100 private polytechnics offering the diploma courses to more than 95,000 students. Earlier there used to be a subject 'English' for all diploma 1st year students. A separate textbook was prescribed to the students of diploma before 2009. The syllabus included some basic grammar topics, composition and some units on vocabulary which included synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, one word substitutes, idioms, and phrases, suffixes and root words. In the present curriculum, C-09, which is in force from 2009-2010 academic year to 2013-2014 academic year, English is taught to all the three year students of diploma. There are four different workbooks prescribed to them. The workbooks are named as 'Enhancing English and Employability skills (EEE) I, II, III, IV respectively for

I year, III semester IV semester and VI semester students. Detailed and non-detailed textbooks are not prescribed to these students like in Intermediate or graduation. These workbooks have the activity based units, which cannot be explained line by line. If any lessons on technical topics are prescribed to the students, there will be a little scope for teaching technical jargon. The students are just guided by the teacher whose role is like a facilitator. The learners are trained to use language in pair work, group work activities which are the techniques of Communicative language teaching. There are some lessons based on the vocabulary in the EEE workbook-1 only. This focuses on how to use a dictionary and learning of root words, affixes, synonyms and antonyms. There is no lesson which focuses only on learning vocabulary in the rest of the workbooks. The expected standard of a diploma holder is to meet the needs of the real life, in securing jobs or going for higher education. The present workbooks do not focus on any kind of teaching technical vocabulary to the diploma student. Hence this research tries to throw light upon deficiencies in the workbooks prescribed by the SBTET and also highlight the teaching / learning of technical vocabulary by using CLT techniques. This humble effort is to know personally from the learners / teachers their problem in learning / teaching vocabulary through different questionnaires, by personal interactions and to analyze them only to evolve right approach and methodology to teach the vocabulary needed for the technical students. Learner's Profile: The qualification required for admission into all the diploma courses except diploma in pharmacy, offered by State Board of Technical Education and Training Andhra Pradesh, is class X. The basic qualification required for admission into D. pharmacy is intermediate. Those who want to join diploma courses have to appear for an entrance examination, Polycet (formerly it was called CEEP). The admission is purely done based on the rank obtained in the Polycet. The students admitted in diploma courses are from different mediums of instruction, namely Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, and English. The class is of heterogeneous nature. Almost 75% colleges offering diploma are of co-education type. The levels of proficiency in English also vary basing on the medium of instruction of students at their respective schools. After completion of diploma, most of the students go for higher education. They write Engineering Common Entrance Test (ECET), a common entrance examination for admission into engineering graduation which will allow the students directly into the second year of engineering through lateral entry. The remaining students go for employment or for self entrepreneurship. Need of the hour: The learning of vocabulary is the key success

factor for acquisition of language. Being a technical student, he / she is expected to master technical vocabulary in addition to the vocabulary for the general purposes. There is a great difference in technical student and a general student. As a technical student, he / she must be aware of the vocabulary for general purpose in general and also to gain competence on technical vocabulary in particular. He / She must realize the difference between those two kinds of vocabulary. The major important point here is that a technical student has to write reports, circulars, memos, technical writing about manufactured products, gadgets and devices, etc. also. So there is a dire necessity for a technical student to learn technical vocabulary even if the students go for employment or for further education. Hence teaching / learning technical vocabulary is must. The current scenario: The communicative skills of a diploma passed student are very low. Even after having exposed to English for nearly 10 years in school, three years in diploma, they are unable to communicate well at the time of interviews, group discussions and also in real life situations. A sample vocabulary test with some key words was conducted to test the level of comprehension and acquisition of vocabulary of a diploma student. The test had only ten simple words. Those words are: 1) Exertion 2) crew 3) device 4) subside 5) cohere 6) foster 7) symmetry 8) cleave 9) scrutinize 10) amalgamate. Results were shockingly below the expected levels. Only thirty out of two hundred students got five correct answers and rest of them got less than five. After seeing the results of the test, two questions arise in a teacher's mind like,

“Why the status of a diploma student in Andhra Pradesh is so poor?” and “what can be done to improve?”

Firstly the base for any language is its vocabulary. If a learner has a good vocabulary he / she can communicate effectively. His / Her communicative skills may be improved by making right words learnt and making him / her uses them in right manner. The curriculum designers and the teachers have to identify the appropriate vocabulary to include it in the curriculum. Those words which are more useful and more repeatedly occupying in the field of his learning/work, they will be given priority to learn/teach. In order to satisfy the needs of a learner, he is expected to learn at least 2000 words for general purposes and at least 1000 words for technical purposes. As a student of technical education I have a question in my mind. How much vocabulary should a learner know in order to communicate? What words are more important to learn first? What vocabulary is the most useful one for a technical

student? I have been trying to know the answers as a student and as a teacher of English for technical students. I am of the opinion that English taught to the polytechnic students is solely insufficient. It is observed that the vocabulary taught in the classroom doesn't suffice and it doesn't give any interest to learn further. The reason is that it doesn't motivate the learner to learn further. A technical student needs to know a lot of technical vocabulary and the vocabulary related to the technical subjects to use it in his professional and personal life. The vocabulary taught presently just barely satisfies the personal requirements. A technical student requires a communicative English to face job interviews, group discussions, JAMs, to write technical reports, research information too. It is now to identify, to analyze the current prescribed workbooks of the students of diploma in polytechnics of Andhra Pradesh and to identify its merits and usefulness, at the same time, to identify its deficiencies by keeping in view the questions asked about. It is to differentiate English for general purposes and English for technical purposes. The effort is to make a list of technical vocabulary which consists of basic technical words which every diploma student is expected to have just as similar to Dolch word list, which consists of 220 service words, and like General Service list, which consists of 2000 words. Afterwards it is to make the learners know those words in all respects; it is also to use those words appropriately. In order to achieve that the learners may be given sufficient exposure and requisite practice by giving them simulated real life situations. One has to keep in mind that words have meaning both as connotation and as denotation. The students are expected to know both the meanings. “Denotation of a word is its primary meaning, such as the dictionary ordinarily specifies, its connotation is the range of secondary or accompanying meaning which commonly suggests or implies. As Abrams, M.H. (1959) rightly shows the difference that the word, home, denotes the place where one lives, but connotes privacy, intimacy or coziness. Most of the students don't have such a conceptual understanding of words. They must be made aware of this. Moreover the students have a narrow outlook for certain words and understand their limited meaning and hence misinterpret them. The learners may be given wide range of exercises for practice to realize the different meanings of a given word. Keeping in view the present teaching methodologies and materials, a new method of teaching vocabulary is to be evolved. An exhaustive research in the area of vocabulary teaching is the need of the hour.

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