

# INTERPERSONAL SKILLS FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS: TEACHING STRATEGIES

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Skill is an ability to utilize one's knowledge to acquire set of traits for a better living. Talent is also an ability in which the acquired is honed and mastered. There are various kinds of skills among which interpersonal skills plays a major role in a student's life and career. Interpersonal skill is a type of ability through which people interact, inter-relate and react with others in all walks of life. It is the need of the hour that every student must possess this great skill to the optimum level to shine bright personally, academically, socially and economically. Overall growth of a student is determined by the way one relates himself/herself with the society that he/she is exposed to. Teaching interpersonal skills for students has become an indispensable act of an English teacher. This paper envisages the various teaching strategies that English teachers can utilize to impart this great life skill among the Engineering students.*

**Keywords:** Skill, Talent, Communication, Interpersonal Skills, Growth.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Communication is the basic tenet of all human being irrespective of its type. It is an integral part of human relationship. The ideas and the thoughts conceived in human mind are transmitted through various medium and the same is decoded and responded. When the encoded message receives the expected response or feedback, the communication is said to be complete. A meaningful communication is an asset of a student. Interpersonal communication is a part of basic communication in which an individual relates himself with the other through communication process.

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Life of a student can be broadly classified into two parts namely academic and profession. It is mandatory for any student to develop oneself in both academic and professional arenas. As the day move on and in this global world of dynamic growth and change, skills of the students play a vital role altogether. Students' academic career is characterized by two skills: they are academic skills and soft skills. Academic skills refer to one's performance in the subjects one studies and the marks obtained. Soft skill is a broad term that comprises of the following skills: Communicative ability, interpersonal skills, initiative, team work and work ethics.

Interpersonal communication is one of the fast growing areas of research, teaching and application of the same in the discipline of speech communication. The interest in interpersonal communication began to boom only from the later part of 20<sup>th</sup> century and now its importance has gained enormous momentum in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Teaching interpersonal communication has become a part of curriculum in many schools and universities. It is made mandatory in all the engineering colleges keeping abreast the notion of professional placements. Imparting

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interpersonal communication skills has given many alternatives for the teachers of English with respect to content, materials and classroom approach. Teachers of English must set in tune to create contents and materials to inculcate interpersonal skills in English classrooms. Rusman (2017) defines learning as a method of communication toward all circumstances that exist around the students. Students' learning process is majorly influenced by the facets of the environment he/she is in and exposed to. These are inseparable, as learning process begins in the students' self-interaction with the environment. Implementation of interaction is possible only through interpersonal communication.

Based on some descriptions of the understanding of interpersonal communication, the researcher can conclude that between-persons or interpersonal communication as a process of face-to-face communication between two or more people that is useful to influence each other and to solve conflict. The indicator of someone having the ability of interpersonal communication can be seen from the seven qualities or skills considered to create effective interpersonal communication (Devito, 2001) that include openness, empathy, positiveness, immediacy, interaction management, expressiveness, and other -orientation. (Khodijah et. al, 2018:151)

Khodijah enumerates the skills that easily highlight a students' interpersonal communication ability. All these skills are automatically acquired and honed if interpersonal communication is developed. Li-Na ZHANG from Teachers' College Shenyang University, China writes, "Interpersonal skills" as a term is broadly similar to social skills and social competence, which are sometimes used interchangeably. Because of its ubiquitous nature, there is no single accepted definition of this term (Zhang, 2018:29). Alton Barbour & Alvin A. Goldherg, University of Denver enumerates 6 focuses of interpersonal communication:

an interpersonal communication focus (1) emphasizes the process of the person interacting rather than the verbal content of the interaction, (2) emphasizes behaviors and skills which extend the alternatives available for interpersonal communication, (3) includes affective as well as cognitive dimensions, (4) draws from the behavioral and other sciences as well as from the humanities, (5) is concerned about both verbal and nonverbal human messages and responses, and (6) represents an emphasis on the objective investigation of the experience of person-to-person communication. (Barbour & Goldherg, 1974:5)

all the focusses mentioned above throws light on the fact that interpersonal communication enables person to person relatedness through communication.

Human territory is divided into different sectors namely: proximity zone, personal zone, social zone and public zone. Students too in general will be definitely exposed to all these sectors in one's life. Equipping students to face all these sectors in life needs a relevant teaching of interpersonal skills in communication. Engineering students who are all set for a professional career needs a strong base of interpersonal communication to manage all these sectors skillfully. Proximity zone refers to family or intimate environment where a student has to spend most of his lifetime. Mastering interpersonal skills will help one to succeed in building a strong family bonding among the loved ones. Personal zone refers to something that has to do with his personal life and career i.e. a 'self-reliant self'. One's self-reliance is based on the quality of environment one is exposed to learn the dynamics of 'self-reliant self'. Social zone is nothing but the academic and professional milieu to which the students are exposed to and public zone refers to one being exposed to the public world.

Mastering interpersonal skills are relevant to one's survival in our society. Equipping students towards survival is the major duty of a teacher; especially the responsibility lies in the hands of the English language teachers, as interpersonal skill is a part of communication skill where communication in English is the dictation in this present era. Choosing teaching strategies for teaching interpersonal skills are enormous. There are some major qualities of interpersonal skills, they are:

1. Interpersonal skill is determinant.
2. Interpersonal skill is need-based.
3. Interpersonal skill develops social exchange.

### 1. Interpersonal skill is determinant

Every communication unit has a purpose of utterance. Interpersonal communication is purposive and there is a purpose in building relationship with the other irrespective of the content and context. For example, if a person seeks help, he/she is supposed to attain or aggravate request. This example shows that the interpersonal skills that are explicit in this communication is purposeful. The communication is made with an expectation or to create a particular demand. Likewise, all the interpersonal communication has a purpose behind it. So it is necessary to develop the skills of purposeful communication. In short interpersonal communication creates purpose of statement in exchanges between people.

### 2. Interpersonal Skill is need-based

No man is bereft of need in this world. Everyone has to satisfy basic needs in life. In communication too, need for communication between people is an essential part that determines the quality of communication. Essential communication is the underlying principle of interpersonal communication. For example, when a person orders someone to close the door, though there is a purpose in communication, yet the need for the communication must also be given prominence. Why did the person request to close the door? The need might not be clear, but every communication between people has a need.

### 3. Interpersonal skill develops social exchange

Inquisitive analysis of interpersonal communication is characterized by questions and answers, clarifications and deliberations between people. In such a communication, social exchanges are numerous. When we analyze the exchanges a person makes in a span of 10 minutes during communication, it really surprises the speaker and listener. The number of exchanges shared in a short span comprises of various purposes and needs.

The need for teaching interpersonal is of great demand in this postmodern era, as the possibility of living and growing in isolation has become a million-dollar question. Teachers of English can never ever excuse themselves with reasons for not teaching students to make them imbibe interpersonal skills because interpersonal skill in general has twin purposes of communication and collaborations. It helps to build and maintain good relationship with the other and also helps to grow with others. This study discusses some of the important teaching strategies that can be inculcated in an English classroom for engineering students:

- A. GROUP COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
- B. PAIR EXCHANGE STRATEGY
- C. SELF-REFLECTION STRATEGY
- D. PEER REFLECTION STRATEGY
- E. SOCIAL GROOMING STRATEGY

#### A. GROUP COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Teamwork is the ability to work together towards a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results. - Andrew Carnegie

**Objectives:** The main objective of this strategy is to create a rapport between one to many and many to one. It is to develop group behaviour.

**Component:** Group discussion / group assignment is a major component that can be used to attain the said objective.

**Process:** Students must be divided into smaller groups of 5 to 6 students. They must be allowed to choose relevant topics of experience for discussion. They must be given room for sharing ideas relevant to the topic chosen without any intervention of the teacher. This group communication strategy must be initiated in a suitable and conducive environment.

**Traits to be taught:** Through this strategy student can learn the art of exchanging and accepting ideas through the process of Turn Taking (TT) and Turn Giving (TG). The student also can be taught critical thinking skills and conflict management skills. They also learn to become empathetic than autocratic. Being empathetic is the ultimate quality of interpersonal skills.

**Outcomes:** The outcomes of this strategy are enormous. Students move from a self-centered learning to learning in a group by sharing one's knowledge. Students learn to accept ideas with care and deny things politely. The critical knowledge of the students grows when they are in group processes.

#### **B. PAIR EXCHANGE STRATEGY**

**Objectives:** The main objective of this strategy is to build relation between two students. One to one communication can be developed.

**Component:** Speaking in pairs (structuring dialogues) / Role talks / Pair presentations.

**Process:Dialogues:** Students need to be divided into pairs and must be asked to choose a topic of their choice and talk. They can ask questions and answer or share ideas and impressions regarding the topic. **Role Talks:** the paired students must be given roles individually and must be asked to communicate relevant to the role given. For eg. Subject teacher – student, Passenger – conductor, Principal-student, Team head – Team member etc.

**Pair Presentations:** Students must be given a title and asked to prepare a write up of presentation and should be given time and suitable environment to present the paper prepared in class.

**Traits to be taught:** Techniques in choosing a title, framing suitable title, process of preparing a content, forming hypothesis, analysis and procedure of research and conclusion. Identifying, choosing, preparing, collaborating, reflecting, comprehending, analyzing and problem resolving skills can be inculcated.

**Outcomes:** Good understanding between pairs, collaborative skills, writing skills, sharing and accepting skills and presentation skills can be developed.

#### **C. SELF-REFLECTION STRATEGY**

“Reflective practice is an active, dynamic action-based and ethical set of skills, placed in real time and dealing with real, complex and difficult situations.” (Moon J, 1999)

**Objectives:** To make students talk about his talk or what he has done, reflect about his/her own talk and re-talk about what he reflected about his talk.

**Component:** Talking about talked / reflexive talks- answering questions.

**Process:** Students must be given 5 minutes to talk on a topic of his/her choice, after the completion of the talk few questions can be posed to make the student reflect on what he / she has already spoken. Rigorous questions on the talk enable the students to remember or repeat or reflect on his own talk exclusively.

**Traits to be taught:**self-reflexive skills, reading skills, listening-response skills, critical thinking skills and speaking skills.

**Outcomes:** Enables students to keep their mind alert and healthy. It increases the mindfulness among students. It develops positive approach towards critical questions. Inculcates the habit of maintaining day book or diary. Helps students manage self-dialogue and increases self-confidence and self-esteem.

#### **D. PEER REFLECTION STRATEGY**

**Objectives:** To increase student's responsibility, student's autonomy and increase in-depth understanding of the content and skills. To convert the status of the students from passive listening to active listening.

**Component:** Peer review of discussions and presentations, peer evaluation of research papers etc.

**Process:** Group discussion or technical presentations can be conducted and the same can be reviewed by the rest of the students in the class. It is also called as the open forum review. The reviews can be clarified by the students in group or the presenter. After every task in the class, peer review process can be conducted

**Traits to be taught:** critical thinking, assessment, reviewing, authentic and substantiating skills.

**Outcomes:** It develops student's autonomy in giving quality feedbacks, positive approach towards peer-assessment through critical comments and dynamism in the thinking capability of the students.

## E. SOCIAL GROOMING STRATEGY

**Objective:** To enable students to groom the communicative capability of the peers. To develop qualities that support and maintain relationships.

**Component:** Pep talks, presentations, extempore, reviews etc.

**Process:** A student with a moderate communication skill must be asked to speak or present something in the class and the same has to be groomed and tailored by the peer. The peer who is nominated can add ideas, can attach feelings and emotions, provide critical and authentic information to what is presented.

**Traits to be taught:** Relation building and maintain skills, supportive skills, politeness and amicability, informative and assertive skills.

**Outcomes:** Fosters caring and supportive friendship and strengthens it. Reduces the harmful effects of stressors. Develops the sense of belonging at the same time develops thinking and communication skills.

All the strategies discussed above can be used within the sphere of normal classroom setting and the need for materials to be used to implement these strategies is minimal. Implementations of these strategies are very simple and viable. Adequate learning for implementations is not necessary. Instead exposure, involvement, creativity and class control is sufficient. The strategies implemented in English classroom through task based learning would yield tons. Focusing interpersonal skills in English classes for engineering students are important because, they are heading towards a professional career and the skillsets speak louder than their academic excellence. Keeping abreast this notion, the teachers and researchers are in the realm of continuous development of strategies to impart interpersonal skills. This in turn provides a chance for engineering students to enjoy an all-round development in their intimate, personal, social and public career. There is wide range of opportunities for research under the topic-development of interpersonal skills among students of engineering studies.

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