Original Article

Teaching of English Communicative Skills Course in NIT Srinagar: The Students' Perspective

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Abstract - English Communication skills in the era of globalization and information technology have acquired tremendous importance and attention across the world. At present, English language teaching in a developing country like India is being treated as a life skill. As such, teaching English communication skills forms an important component of various engineering colleges, including the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Srinagar.The English language plays a crucial role in the academic and professional development of engineering students, making it essential for them to enhance their English Communication Skills. The effectiveness of this development largely depends on factors such as the curriculum, teaching methods, syllabus structure, learning environment, and available audio-visual resources. In this context, the current study seeks to gather feedback from engineering students at NIT Srinagar regarding the English Communication Skills course(s) offered at the institute. The student's views were collected through a carefully crafted questionnaire that addressed various aspects of the course.The results of the study highlighted a significant dissatisfaction among students with the existing English Communication Skills syllabus. According to the students, the current curriculum primarily emphasizes the structural elements of the language while overlooking its functional aspects. The feedback indicates that the current syllabus does not meet the intended objectives of the course and requires immediate revision to better align with the needs of the students.

Keywords - Communicative skills, Engineering students, English language teaching, Needs, Syllabus.

1. Introduction

The introduction of the English language in Kashmir dates back to the late 19th century when Christian missionaries first brought it in. Initially taught in missionary-run schools, English gradually made its way throughout the Kashmir Valley. Today, it holds a dominant position and is widely used across various sectors such as education, research, government administration, entertainment, business, and technology. In 2020, the Indian Parliament passed legislation recognizing English, alongside Kashmiri, Dogri, Hindi, and Urdu, as one of the official languages of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Due to its global relevance, English is widely perceived by Kashmiris as a language associated with power and prestige. Many young people in the region prefer using English in peer interactions, often considering it a means to elevate their social standing. Its popularity is largely fueled by the access it provides to international opportunities and exposure. The increasing number of English-medium schools in the valley further reflects its growing influence and importance.

Globally, English serves as a bridge language, connecting people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. A report by a former president of the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) highlighted that only 25% of technical graduates are considered employable in the outsourcing sector, primarily due to inadequate English communication skills. The importance of English in the corporate world is now well-established. While English proficiency is essential for all students, it holds particular significance for engineering students who aim to work in multinational companies. In these diverse workplaces, English often becomes the common medium of communication due to the multilingual nature of employees.

Therefore, a strong command of English communication skills is crucial for engineering students to enhance their career prospects. Recognizing this, engineering institutions need to place greater emphasis on English language training to better prepare students for professional challenges. Given the importance of effective communication in academic and professional settings, the present study was undertaken to explore this issue among engineering students at the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Srinagar.

2. English Communicative Skills Teaching at NIT Srinagar

NIT Srinagar is a technical institute in the Kashmir Valley, and it is fully funded by the central government. English Communication Skills course is one of the compulsory subjects for engineering students in this institution for the first two semesters in the following streams: Electrical, Electronics and Communication, Computer Science, Information Technology, Civil, Chemical, Mechanical and Metallurgy & Material Science. The course is offered under the titles "Basic English and Communication Skills" and "Advanced English Communication Skills and Organizational Behavior" in both semesters, respectively, and offers 4 credits each. The course is designed to develop students' basic reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. It is organized in a manner that reading, vocabulary, grammar, and writing exercises are interconnected. It facilitates an understanding of the word structure and, thereby, enrichment in vocabulary. It also assists the students in acquiring knowledge of formal writing skills. The presentation skills taught through the course intend to enhance the expressive skills of the students to enable them to express their feelings, thoughts, and expressions effectively.The Language Lab in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of NIT, Srinagar, caters to the communicative needs of the learners. The lab is soundproof and has around 30 desktops with various language-related software. The language lab course is conducted simultaneously with the Basic English and Communication Skills course and Advanced English and Communication Skills Course of the first two semesters and contributes 1 credit to the learners' academic syllabus.

2.1. Linguistic and Educational Background of the Learners

The learners enrolled in the course come from different linguistic backgrounds, viz., English and non-English, and belong to different areas of the country. The medium of instruction during their schooling has been varied, with Hindi being the primary language for most students. Consequently, these students have experienced diverse teaching methods and approaches. However, learners report that such factors are overlooked when designing the curriculum, and no diagnostic tests are administered to address these differences. It is pertinent to mention that the syllabus is the same for all learners, and the heterogeneous linguistic background of the learners is not taken into consideration. It is also important to note that most learners come from uneducated backgrounds, having completed their schooling in local government institutions with little to no exposure to English as a language. These students have unique needs that remain unaddressed. These students attend classes alongside peers with relatively stronger communication skills, causing them to fall behind, particularly in spoken language proficiency.

3. Methodology

The present paper elicited and ascertained the responses of engineering students of NIT Srinagar about the English Communication course(s) being run in the institute. The study aims to explore students' perspectives on the existing syllabus and teaching methods, thus evaluating the effectiveness of the current curriculum in addressing their needs. The responses of the students were elicited through a,

- Well-designed questionnaire and
- A structured interview comprising questions related to various aspects of the course.

The data for the current study was taken from the students of the 3rd semester of NIT, Srinagar. The study sample consisted of 60 students. Both male and female participants took part in the study. The learner-based questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part 1 was about the gap between the needs of the learners and the syllabus. Part 2 was about the perception of the learners about their communication skills.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Analysis

This section of the research study presents and analyzes data using graphs and charts. The evaluation of engineering students' perceptions regarding their communication needs and English communication courses was conducted through a questionnaire survey, interviews, and group discussions

4.1.1. Part 1

The figures below show the results of the collected data:

Learners' Perception of the Most Emphasized Skills in the English Syllabus at Present

As is evident from Figure 1, above graphical representation, 50% of the respondents said that writing is the most emphasized skill in their English syllabus at present. 40.9% of respondents said that more emphasis is given to speaking skills, while 4.5% of the respondents each vouched for listening and reading skills in response to the question regarding the most emphasized skills in the English syllabus. The results clearly show that every language skill is not given equal space, which can become a handicap in the development of communicative skills. It goes without saying that each skill should be given equal importance and emphasis in order to improve the communication skills of the learners.
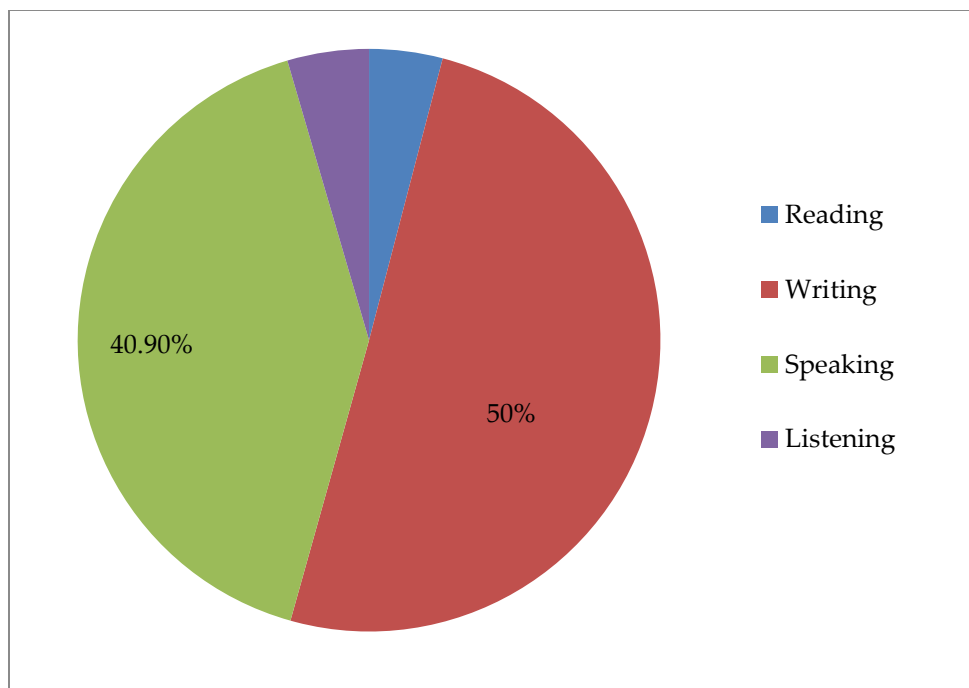

Fig. 1 Learners' perception about most emphasized skills in the English syllabus at present

Learners' Perception of Most Ignored Skills in the English Syllabus at Present

Figure 2 shows that the learners ranked speaking skills as the most ignored area in the current syllabus. 63.6% of the learners believe that the existing syllabus of English ignores speaking skills the most in comparison to other language skills. It is pertinent to mention here that speaking is the most needed skill in the corporate sector, yet the most neglected in college.
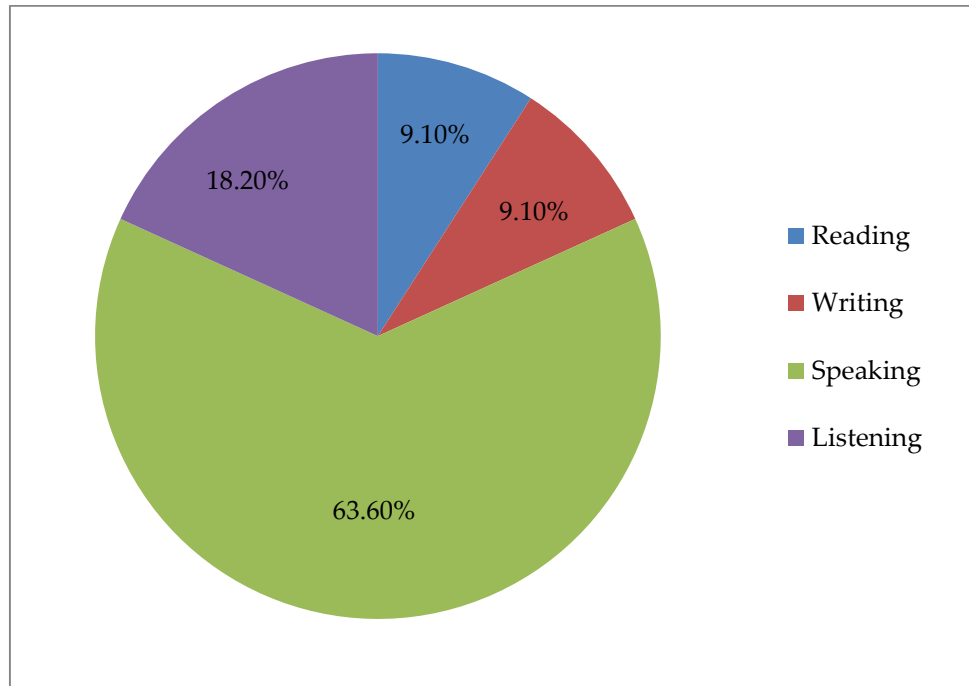

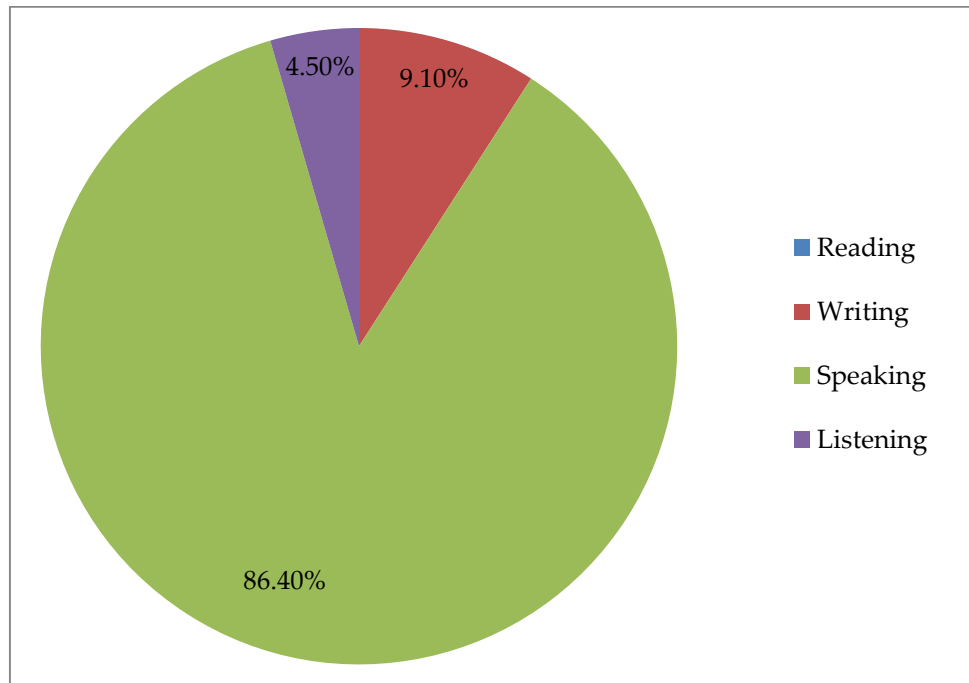**Fig. 2 Learners' perception of most ignored skills in the English syllabus at present**

Fig. 3 Learners' perception of the skills they want to improve

Learners' Perception of the Skills they Want to Improve

It is clear from the Figure 3 that a whopping majority of 86.4% of learners claim that speaking is the skill that they want to improve. Therefore, it can be inferred that speaking skills are the ones to be improved and eventually mastered, as this skill is very important for both academics and career prospects.
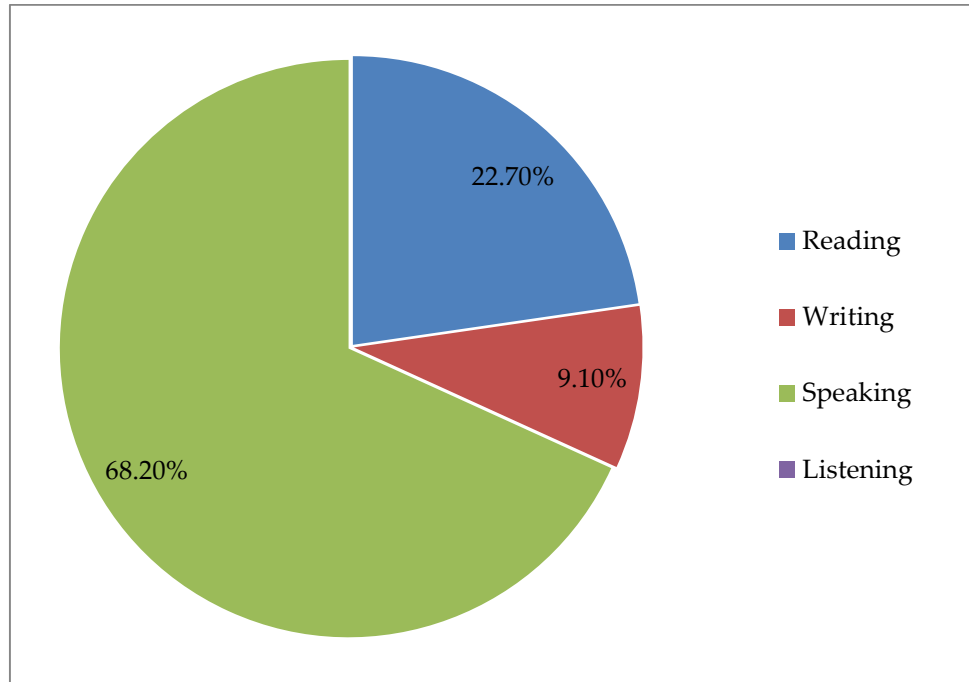

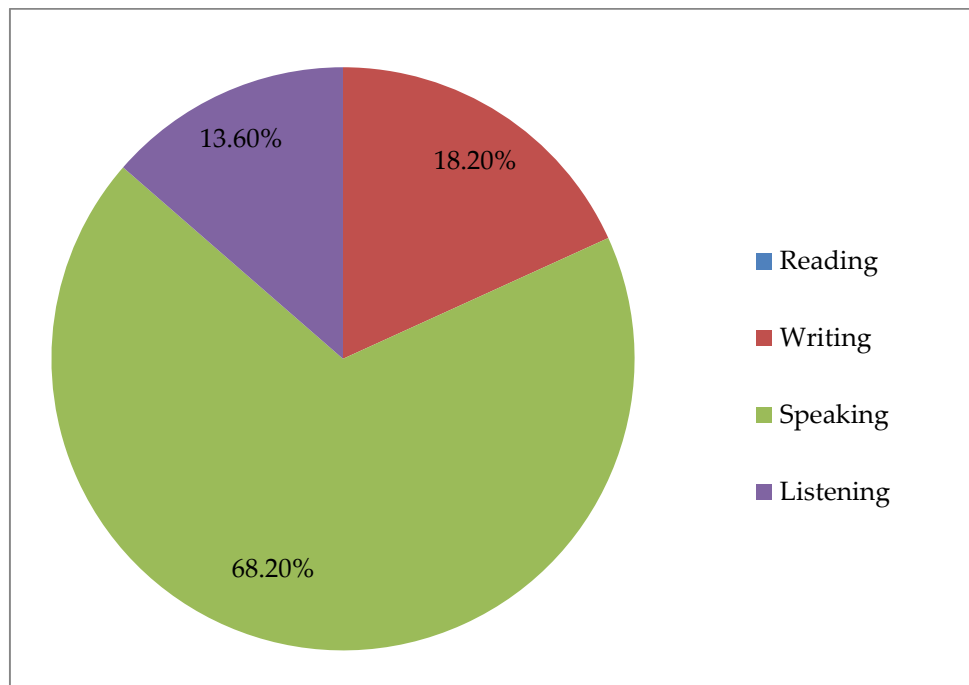**Fig. 4 Learners' perception of the skill that should be focused on more**

Fig. 5 Learners' perception about the skill they lack the most

Learners' Perception of the Skill that should be Focused More

The majority of the learners emphasized that more focus must be given to the improvement of their speaking skills, taking into consideration their academic and professional needs. It is also believed that awareness needs to be created among the students regarding the need and significance of all four skills in the professional world. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and Information Technology (IT) companies in India recruit engineering candidates who have good English-speaking skills. Therefore, engineering students are bound to have good communication skills so that other soft skills would match the expectations of the job providers. Learners' perception of the skill that should be focused on more is shown in Figure 4.

Learners' Perception of the Skill they Lack the Most

According to 68.2% of the learners, they lack speaking skills the most in comparison to the other three language skills (Figure 5). There is no doubt that the syllabus focuses on developing the speaking and presentation skills of the learners, but. there is still a gap between the expectations and the actual delivery, and it needs to be properly filled.

4.1.2. Part 2

This part of the questionnaire elicits information from the learners regarding the perception of their English communicative skills.

S. no.	Question	Yes	No
1	Did the English syllabus provide you with the skills you need to use the English language in a professional setting?	35%	65%
2.	Do you think the English syllabus should be adapted to better suit students' learning needs?	95.2%	4.8%
3.	Do you think English teaching methods need to be updated or improved?	90.5%	9.5%
4.	Do you face problems in speaking but are pretty good at writing?	81%	19%
5.	Do you think your English presentation skills need improvement?	90.5%	9.5%
6.	Do you think your English language needs are addressed in the current syllabus?	23.8%	76.2%
7.	Do you feel satisfied with your current level of English speaking skills?	23.8%	76.2%
8.	Are you satisfied with your current level of English writing skills?	61.9%	38.1%
9.	Do you believe your English listening skills are strong?	85.7%	14.3%
10.	Are you satisfied with your current level of English reading skills?	76.2%	23.8%
11.	Do you believe your existing English syllabus is based on traditional methods of teaching and learning?	71.4%	28.6%
12.	Do you believe the current English syllabus emphasizes structural skills over functional skills?	90%	10%

The data presented in the table clearly indicates that a significant portion of students expect the English Communication Skills course to align with both their academic objectives and career aspirations. Approximately 65% of respondents felt that the current curriculum does not effectively equip them with the language skills necessary for future employment. This underscores a strong desire among learners to acquire English proficiency as a means of enhancing job prospects.Moreover, 95% of the students expressed the view that the existing syllabus requires revision to address their specific needs better. They even identified particular components of the course content that they believe should be updated. Learners also voiced dissatisfaction with the prevailing teaching methods, noting that the instruction is largely lecture-based and lacks the level of interactivity they find beneficial.When it comes to speaking skills, only 19% of the participants reported confidence in their oral communication abilities, while the majority—81%—felt they were better at writing but struggled with spoken

English due to limited proficiency and self-assurance. This reflects a noticeable mismatch between what the students need and what the syllabus currently offers.Additionally, 71% of the learners observed that the classroom environment remains rooted in conventional teaching practices. Speaking skills were identified as the most crucial area for improvement, yet the current English Communication Skills course reportedly neglects functional communication, limiting its effectiveness in helping students develop real-world communication competence.

5. Conclusion

The present study primarily investigated the perspective of the students regarding the English Communicative Skills Course taught at NIT Srinagar. The results revealed that speaking is considered the most needed skill by engineering students; however, the majority of the students were of the opinion that they lacked speaking skills the most among the four language skills. A prodigious majority of learners ranked speaking skills as the most suitable skill for the professional skill that they want to adopt. The learners are pursuing engineering courses and are planning to work in MNCs with workers with heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds. English, being a global language, is considered to be the only medium of communication in such circumstances. The analysis of the data also revealed that most of the learners are not satisfied with the existing English syllabus and want the syllabus to be modified according to their needs. The findings of the current study also showed that, as per the opinion of the learners, the existing syllabus of NIT Srinagar does not fulfil the goals and objectives of the English communication skills course and, as such, needs immediate attention to cope with the needs of the students. The analysis of the learners' responses clearly shows that the English course has not helped to develop the English communicative skills of the learners, although the course has been described as being designed to develop the basic reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills of the students. However, according to the learners, no activity has been incorporated to develop their listening and speaking skills. The medium of instruction in learners' secondary schools has also been heterogeneous, with Hindi being the medium of instruction for the majority of students. As such, these students had a different curriculum, and also different teaching methods were adopted during their schooling. It is pertinent to mention here that such factors have not been taken into consideration while framing the syllabus. For the English Communication Skills course, the syllabus is the same for all the learners since no diagnostic tests are conducted. Even though the use of the English Lab is a part of the course and contributes one credit to the learner's syllabus, the emphasis is laid more on the text and grammar and less on skills or skill-based exercises (LSRW)

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