

Business Communication Curriculum in the Indian Context: A Teacher's Perspective

Y. Sreenivasulu

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa
E-mail: yadamalas2011@gmail.com

R.V. Jayanth Kasyap

Faculty, Dept. of English, Yogi Vemana University: Kadapa
E-mail: rvjayanth@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The increasing globalization of business has created a serious demand for communication skills in English. Therefore, the curriculum of Business Communication has become a key element to meet the growing global demands of business industry today. Considering the objectives of the course in both B-School and other university affiliated professional colleges, the present paper aims at evaluating the current Business Communication curriculum contents from teacher's point of view. Further, observations on course implementation, teaching and learning approaches, and problems in teaching and learning have been examined critically. The paper puts forth certain viable recommendations for the effective designing and implementation of Business Communication curriculum meant for students of professional colleges in India.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that English in general and Business English in particular as a lingua franca has been immensely influencing the business environment with its obvious advantages. Therefore, this scenario resulted in never before significance of business communication in the context of business setting. This also paved the way for emergence of B-Schools in India as communication hubs to cater to the needs of future business challenges. In addition to that, one can find an increasing number of private and aided management colleges across the country. However, in fact, majority of the candidates passing out

of these institutions pathetically lack the employability skills in tune with the current needs of the global business domain. It is evident from the findings of the survey by McKinsey of Global Institute, the U.S.A: "Only 13% of university graduates from emerging or low-wage countries are suitable for employment in multi-national companies, and the primary reason cited is lack of English communication skills".

In this regard, course curriculum has become a key element for all the stakeholders. In order to understand the status and effectiveness of the curriculum, it is quite essential to evaluate in the light of changing global needs in business

environment. This paper broadly discusses the merits and demerits of Business Communication curriculum, as to what extent it meets the global needs. In addition, other aspects such as whether it is teacher or learner-centred, its implementation, methods of teaching, and role of teachers, and their viewpoints on Business Communication curriculum are examined.

Business Communication Curriculum in India

The following implicit and explicit objectives (both theory and lab components) of Business Communication for an MBA course from various universities are tentatively listed in descending order of importance.

- To equip them with the required skills to cater to the needs of the corporate world.
- To help students acquire the basics of interpersonal communication, corporate communication and soft skills, personality development, body language and social etiquette.
- To make them aware of written communication in letter writing and report writing.
- To develop among students the critical ability to judge the texts prescribed dispassionately.
- To prepare students for higher courses in their respective disciplines.
- To inculcate certain “moral” and “ethical” values in students.

- To develop among students the ability to communicate their ideas cogently and effectively.
- To develop among students “Oral Communicative Skills and Soft Skills”.
- To stimulate in students a “desire” to read even beyond the prescribed texts.
- To develop among students a taste for “Business English”.

(Source: syllabus copies of various universities in India)

With reference to various curriculum components in Indian technical and formal universities, the following topics and sub-topics in a Business Curriculum can be viewed as common for both theory and laboratory. They are:

- Communication – theory – forms of communication - Verbal and Non-verbal - Barriers – Kinesics.
- Types of Communication – Oral – Aural - Writing and reading – Vocabulary - Applications of Communication – Parameters in Communication.
- Presentations – Types – Video Conferencing – Participation in Meetings – Chairing Sessions.
- Interviews - Formal and informal – Interviewing in different settings and for different purposes.
- Written Communication – differences between spoken and written communication – features of effective

writing such as clarity, brevity, appropriate tonal clarity, balance, etc. – GMAT, TOEFL models.

- Letter writing – Business Letters – Pro-forma Culture – Format – Style – Effectiveness, Promptness – Analysis of Sample Letters Collected from Industry – Email, Fax.
- Business and Technical Report Writing - Types of Reports – Format – Analysis of Sample Reports from Industry – Synopsis and Thesis Writing.

(Source: syllabus copies from various universities in India)

The above contents of Business Communication syllabus will broadly cover the following skills.

- General Communication Skills
- Technical Communication Skills
- Leadership Communication Skills
- Vocabulary and Basic Language Skills
- Listening Skills
- Speaking Skills
- Reading Skills
- Writing Skills

ELCS Laboratory Component

To supplement the Business Communication theoretical components, many universities have introduced practical with different titles such as ‘English Language Communication Skills

Laboratory’, ‘Professional Communication Skills Laboratory’, and ‘Executive Communication Skills Laboratory’, etc. to enhance students’ communication skills for business environment. The contents of the lab are both computer assisted (CALL) and task-oriented. The lab component includes a sufficient portion of phonetics, stress, and intonation, speaking skills like role-play, telephonic English, presentations, interviews, discussions, etc. It also covers the listening (recognition/gap filling task), reading (comprehension), and writing skills (resume preparation). To deal with all the above skills in computer assisted language lab, the required software has been referred by the syllabus designers. However, this is an additional asset to the language learners to improve their communication skills for real life needs.

Merits and Demerits of the Curriculum

Business Communication in India has been developed as a specific domain of ELT due to an increasing demand from the MNC’s for able communicators. Within a short span, it has become a key for successful placement in everybody’s dream companies. The prescribed curriculum contents of all the colleges have their own merits and demerits.

Merits

- The components of syllabi are progressively difficult and student-friendly. The thrust is on writing which is a crucial productive skill.
- They are aimed at enriching vocabulary

required to communicate effectively in business transactions.

- The writing skill has more weightage as contents such as preparing various kinds of reports; letters, resumes, comprehending paragraph, etc. will be more useful to be comfortable at work places. This skill is also important to face competitive exams like GMAT and TOEFL confidently.
- They focus on a learner's language needs to be carried out efficiently at work places. The contents cover the required work-related tasks such as making presentations, writing e-mails and reports, negotiating, participating in meetings, conversing with visitors, using appropriate body language, etc.
- They provide the essential skills and knowledge for young managers to lead the complex business settings successfully.
- It aims at preparing learners to existing global communication concepts and improves their communication and problem solving skills.

Demerits

- The prescribed syllabi do not take into account the changing and growing needs of the global scenario.
- The curriculum lacks uniformity and consistency and varies from one university to the other.
- The curriculum at times does not appear

to be pragmatic as lot of content is taught in the class ignoring the language components.

- Too many reference books are suggested and each author presents his own notions, which are distinctively different from others.
- The background of students is not reckoned and they are exposed to advanced communication skills as a result learners find it difficult to cope with the situation.

Besides merits and demerits, motivation of learner is a crucial parameter. Gaining motivation from the curriculum depends on learner's perceptions and abilities. In most of the institutions, students are merely preoccupied with the examination and it is only the motivation factor. As a result, teaching and learning is carried out mere ritualistically defeating the very purpose of the course. It substantiates the point of view that it is largely instrumental motivation. According to the recent survey by Web Portal MBAuniverse.com and Assessment Company Merit-Trac: "The majority of MBA graduates in India are not employable. Outside the top 25 Business Schools, the remaining provided with only 21 per cent of their graduates with job".

From the teacher's point of view, contents dealing with spoken skills in the curriculum are sufficient for any Indian graduate to tune oneself to the multidisciplinary communication environment. However, the lacuna lies in implementing the curriculum and fulfilling its objectives in true sense.

Curriculum Implementation: Various Approaches

Mixed opinions surface regarding the application of approaches to deal with Business Communication in the classroom. Though the curriculum designers make it clear while stating the objectives that it is fit for learner-centred approach, which is, aimed at learners' real life needs, it is only for namesake. The realities taste bitter. As it is well known, except B-Schools and a few Central Universities, many professional MBA colleges affiliated to state universities in India are not equipped with minimum infrastructure like eligible faculty, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, software and infrastructure, etc. Observing the curriculum contents, around sixty percent of the topics are activity based or performance oriented. However, the employability percentage for the last three years (less than 25 per cent) speaks for itself exposing the poor implementation. Only the teachers and taught are fully aware about the amount of sanctity that is being attached to the course.

Further, it is essential for the teacher to introspect periodically his own approach in implementing the curricular aspects. The teacher has his own constraints such as covering the syllabus and fulfilling the targets fixed by the managements. Moreover, students are more inclined towards the core subjects, so all the above factors affect the communication skills of students, which are evident from their performance during different stages of interviews. To overcome such situation, one

should depend on the methods and strategies of teaching which are feasible and which genuinely aim at imparting necessary skills.

To teach Business Communication curriculum for MBA graduates, each skill demands a specific approach. Among several approaches (e.g., Communicative, Structural, Audio-Lingual, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Direct Method) in English Language Teaching, communicative and structural approaches would be appropriate to teach Business English curriculum. Particularly, structural approach is suitable for both 'Oral Communication Skills' and 'Writing Skills' such as telephoning, role plays, letter writing, report writing, e-mail writing. To teach 'Presentation Skills' and Negotiation Skills' such as group work, planning and making an oral presentation and problem solving communicative approach is more suitable. Further, to impart the task based activities, audio-lingual and communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches are apt. Audio-lingual method is useful to impart 'Listening Skills' where learners are supposed to listen and comprehend the language used by the native speakers. Through CLT, a teacher can deal with the 'Vocabulary' and 'Reading Skills' by engaging the learners in pairs/group/individual to practice the specific terminology both in oral and written forms. Teachers can assign various tasks to students like reading reports, articles, magazines, etc. to improve their reading comprehension. Finally, to impart

'Grammar Skill', language teachers would prefer the direct method in Indian classrooms.

These methods of teaching may differ from institute to institute and teacher to teacher in reality. Teachers with better orientation and the sufficient understanding of approaches can deliver the goods provided they receive the real boosting from the institutional resources and their work culture.

Problems in teaching and learning Business English

Teaching Business English in Indian professional colleges is always a difficult task for language teachers. In a broad sense, it may be due to socio-cultural diversities, scarcity of men and materials and poor motivational levels of students. The following may be considered as the most influencing factors in teaching and learning process.

- Students from convent based school background are in a more advanced position when compared to the rural students who are underprivileged. The matter of concern is the quality of teaching in rural schools and lack of opportunities for the students to enrich skills in English language.
- Language teachers have no proper training. The need for effective language teacher training to impart English language communication skill is emphasized by the recent National Knowledge Commission report.

- Non-availability of teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, workbooks, teacher's handbooks, lab manuals and audio-visual materials like TV's, computers, software, etc. are demotivating the teaching/learning process. This made the teaching/learning process imaginative than realistic.
- There is a dearth of competent English teachers in India. Language teacher training Universities like EFLU, RIE, and ELTC are not sufficient to train the teachers.
- The heterogeneity factor, the presence of students with mixed abilities and their varying needs pose formidable challenges to teachers.
- Teaching and Testing should go together. However, there is a serious mismatch between the two. Content is tested and language is being ignored. Assessment pattern and the kinds of questions in the examination are encouraging learners to memorize. Language skills are not being tested sufficiently; speaking skills are totally ignored. Even teachers are unable to motivate learners in this regard as they target at memorizing the notes from low-standard materials and reproducing them in the examinations.
- The presence of unqualified and incompetent teachers, who lack the real exposure, cannot deliver the goods. The faculty, in order to effectively fulfill the objectives laid down in the curriculum should equip themselves thoroughly by

keeping abreast of the trends, concepts and innovations in Business Communication by attending conferences, workshops, training programmes and also by fine-tuning their teaching methodologies in tune with the changing needs.

Considering all the problems discussed above, the standard of teaching/learning Business English is disgracefully low. The primary need of an MBA graduate is to acquire good basics in the principles of finance, marketing, or other specializations and sound knowledge in communication skills to survive in business environment. With the problems listed above, it is always questionable to what extent the curriculum is being implemented and how graduates are benefitted at the end. Hence, it is understood that curriculum designers dump

too many responsibilities on the shoulders of language teachers, which, practically speaking, may be difficult to fulfill.

However, management institutes with right curriculum implementation besides the B-Schools are a rarity. One can find plenty of reasons for B-Schools' popularity among the circuit of Indian management education. These schools are far ahead with state universities and its affiliated MBA colleges in imparting all the required skills for today's global business environment. Here is look at the broad differences between the two categories.

The intention behind the identifying the shortcomings in state university/ professional colleges is not to undermine its value but to provide a scope to seek certain remedies to better the situation.

B-Schools	State Universities/ Professional Colleges
<p>B-Schools have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An autonomous status. • Well-scheduled academic calendar, which is followed strictly • Well-designed curriculum for global needs and proper implementation • Sufficient and skilled regular faculty • Well-equipped and advanced infrastructure • Motivating and learner-friendly learning environment • Emphasis on imparting the practical knowledge • Opportunity to experience multi-cultural environment. 	<p>Professional MBA colleges have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Except a few institutes, others are affiliated to their respective state universities. • Erratic and ill-planned schedule. • Curriculum with the same global perspectives but its implementation is big question due to institutional problems. • Insufficient and un-skilled faculty. • No learner-friendly environment... • Focus on teacher-centred method of teaching and less focus on practical knowledge. • No scope to experience multi-cultural environment.

The current course contents of Business Communication should be more pragmatic. Usually, English language courses are multi-dimensional in nature, which aim at overall personal and professional development of learners. To fulfill such aims, it would be better to impart the Basic English language skills even before taking up professional courses. That is, the idea of including English language as one of the subjects in common entrance examinations would be helpful to some extent. To address the problems at the level of implementation, professional colleges have to appoint eligible and better-qualified faculty or train the existing language faculty frequently to adopt advanced and innovative methods of teaching. In order to fulfill the objectives, it is possible to suggest the following recommendations:

- Current syllabus should be fine-tuned / modified according to learners' needs.
- Course structure should be from the basic level to advanced level.
- Introducing periodical assessment.
- Greater Focus on skills.
- Evaluation pattern should be modified.

References

- Breen, M. P. and Cardin, C. (1980). The essentials of a communicative curriculum in large teaching, *Applied Linguistics*, 1: 89-112.
- In-House. *Learning English: A communicative approach*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006.
- Mary Ellen Gaffe Thomson, *Business Communication: Process and product*, South-Western.
- Matthews, Rama (eds.) (1992-93). Evaluation in the language curriculum, Special Issue of *Journal of English and Foreign Languages*, CIEFL, Hyderabad: Nos.10 and 11, (1992-93).
- Mohan, Krishna and Meer Energy. (2000). *Developing communication skills*, Macmillan India Limited.
- Regional Institute of English. (2006). *English for engineers*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Saraswathi, V. (2004). *English language teaching: Principles and practice*, Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan.

Letters to the Editor

Members of ELTAI are free to give their views on the articles published in this journal. The letters should reach the ELTAI (eltai_india@yahoo.co.in) with cc to the Editor (ramanipn@gmail.com) within a month from the date of publication of the journal.