

## Enhancing Vocabulary for Undergraduate Technical Students: Need Analysis

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### ABSTRACT:

The significance of words in communication is paramount, regardless of the language employed by communicators. The English language, with its extensive vocabulary, provides individuals with a broader range of choices for mastering effective communication. However, many Indian students, especially those pursuing undergraduate degrees in Technology, encounter challenges in expanding their English vocabulary.

Furthermore, there exists a notable distinction in the English language learning experience between students pursuing general courses and those in technical fields. Technical students are tasked with activities such as preparing project reports, presenting papers, and writing for journals, necessitating a robust grasp of technical vocabulary. Regrettably, the evaluation of technical vocabulary is often overlooked in interviews, where the focus tends to be on business and general vocabulary.

This paper aims to address the difficulties faced by undergraduate technical students in acquiring business vocabulary. It discusses the shortcomings of available materials, suggests effective learning methods, and explores related issues in this context.

**Keywords:** technical, vocabulary, students, curriculum, business, academic

### INTRODUCTION

The essence of any language lies in its vocabulary, as emphasized by Wilkins in 1972. While grammar is essential for communication, it is the richness of vocabulary that truly conveys meaning. Without a sufficient vocabulary, effective communication becomes impossible. 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, especially one which accompanies a text in a foreign language”. It is indisputable that acquiring proficiency in any language is contingent upon mastering its vocabulary. In the context of learning the English language, effectiveness is achieved through a comprehensive grasp of its vocabulary. Whether consulting definitions from sources such as OALD or others, the consistent term that emerges in any description of vocabulary is "words." In simpler terms, teaching vocabulary essentially involves instructing individuals on words.

This paper attempts to explore sincerely, the easiest and the most effective ways to teach business vocabulary to all the student community in general and to undergraduate technical students in particular. The word ‘word’ is defined from different perspectives keeping in mind, different contexts. Some of them are: As Nitin Paul Mehta in his article to Hindustan Times, on July 7th 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 conclusions, 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” (Paul, 1991). Word is the vehicle of our thoughts. There are multiple meanings for a word based on its form and functionality. There may be conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, grammatical meaning, and referential meaning to a word and so on. Hence the definition of a word also can be given based on its aspect and position.

The orthographic definition conveys that word is the smallest meaningful unit of language. Bloomfield gives the definition to it from a 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 meaning unit of language, and it must contain at least one potentially free-standing morpheme.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. Is it necessary for technical undergraduate students to learn specific vocabulary?
2. What are the possible contexts in which they depend on jargon?

### **IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY**

The core content of any language is its vocabulary. Language is a requirement for human beings to interact with one another. 'Language is a human ability to communicate with another using a sign, such as words, gestures, or tools to interact and communicate' (Sari & Lestari, 2019) Acquisition of a language is not possible without comprehension of its vocabulary. Language is the means of communication. The data from Wikipedia site says that there are approximately 6909 living languages in the world. Mandarin is the largest spoken language with 329 million native speakers. The third place is occupied by English with 328 million native speakers, and it is considered to be the 'lingua franca', the language of masses and also considered to be the universal language. Mandarin and Spanish, on the other hand, are not considered 'lingua franca'.

There are innumerable reasons for English to achieve its popularity all over the world, but not its or the other counterparts. One strong reason is that the British Empire established colonies in almost all continents and spread the use of English. Indians also have inseparable bond with English language. 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 proceedings take place in English language, in India. It is also called the library language. India is known to have 1645 regional or local languages and English serves as the link language among the speakers of all these languages. English language has become the most essential communication tool not only for Indians but also for the global citizens. It has become almost compulsory for Indians to learn English language, in addition to the mother tongue wherever there is a choice. According to some experts in the academic arena, English has become second mother tongue/second language of Indians. It's the source of employment and also a passport for livelihood.

Learning any language, English in particular, can be effective and systematic only when it is learned with appropriate vocabulary. English vocabulary is an amalgam of many languages such as French, German, Russian, Celtic etc., including Indian languages like Hindi, Telugu and so on. Hence teaching English vocabulary can be very challenging and interesting job to any teacher especially in the Indian context.

## **TEACHING/LEARNING VOCABULARY FOR UNDERGRADUATE TECHNICAL STUDENTS**

Learning vocabulary for general purposes is totally a different area altogether. English for Undergraduate students of Science and Technology (EST) focuses on the technical contexts of the science and technological domains. Teaching vocabulary for technical students is different from teaching vocabulary for students of non-technical courses or for general purposes. The technical students are required to attend group discussions (GDs), Just a Minute (JAM) sessions and to prepare technical report writings, present research papers on emerging technologies, write lab reports, conduct experiments etc. which demand technical vocabulary.

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, which is in force for last few academic years to current academic year, English is taught to all the first year students of B.Tech programme. But in some institutions English communication skills are taught for the students of all years taking their knowledge levels into consideration. There are different workbooks prescribed to them according to year of study they are in. These workbooks are much useful to enhance English and Employability Skills (EEE) or English and Soft Skills. Detailed and non-detailed textbooks are not prescribed to these students like in their Intermediate or plus two education. These workbooks carry the activities based on the units, which cannot be explained line by line.

If any lesson on technical topic is prescribed to the students, there will be a little scope for teaching technical jargon as the teacher of English is also not so familiar with given vocabulary sometimes. The students are just guided by the teacher and the English teacher's role is like a facilitator. The learners are taught to use language by participating in pair works, group work activities which are the techniques of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). There are some lessons based on the vocabulary in the prescribed or suggested workbooks. This is to make students aware of how to use dictionary and how to learn root words, suffixes, synonyms and antonyms. There is no lesson which focuses only on learning vocabulary as most of the Units in the workbooks cover vocabulary as a sub-skill and provide some words to practice.

The expected standard of an undergraduate technical student is to meet the needs of real life, in securing jobs or going for higher education. The present workbooks focus more on

improving technical vocabulary to the student. Hence this research paper tries to throw light upon deficiencies in the workbooks prescribed and also highlight the teaching /learning of technical vocabulary by using CLT techniques. This humble effort is to know personally from the learners about their problems in learning business vocabulary through different ways. The personal interactions of the English teachers with their students and their analyses of the learners' abilities in improving the vocabulary needed for the technical students. The teachers of English are having some issues with regard to the kind of atmosphere required to teach/improve students vocabulary.

The English teachers of technical institutions face different and difficult problems either academically or non- academically. Initially, the duration of the time is insufficient and Secondly each class has a variety of levels of English proficiency learners with a variety of interests and a variety of paces of studying. So, it is mere difficult task to lead the students through varied levels of learning, sometimes it makes the students to become passive. These are the various reasons, where a facilitator needs to individualize the study of English in order to get more effective results. (Gupta, 2013)

### **NEED FOR FOCUSING ON VOCABULARY**

Mastering business and technical vocabulary is a critical success factor for thriving in the professional arena. For students in technical fields, proficiency in technical vocabulary is essential, alongside a solid grasp of general-purpose vocabulary. A clear distinction exists between technical and general students. Technical students are expected not only to be acquainted with general-purpose vocabulary but also to attain expertise in technical terminology. Recognizing the disparity between these two types of vocabulary is crucial.

The key point is that technical students are required to engage in diverse writing tasks, such as reports, circulars, memos, and technical documents related to manufactured products, gadgets, and devices. This necessity persists whether students pursue employment or further education. Therefore, there is an urgent need for technical students to acquire proficiency in technical vocabulary. The teaching and learning of technical vocabulary become imperative in light of these considerations.

### **THE CURRENT SCENARIO FOR EVERY LEARNER**

Successful communication in the business world depends upon assuring that the persons or the parties involved receive the same information in the same manner. Vocabulary is such an important tool that facilitates understanding by reducing larger matter or content into smaller with the help of more concise words and phrases. Whereas business vocabulary allows two people or groups to have a simple, clear conversation without the necessity of explaining complicated ideas. It also constantly checks that information is received appropriately. In many ways the jargon is universal throughout the business world, some words are restricted to specific area of business. As undergraduate technical students focus on a set of words during their education period, but in their corporate or business career, better knowledge of field-specific vocabulary remains as a crucial skill that will help them communicate more clearly further in their personal and business goals. The ideal way to improve one's vocabulary is to stay up to date on regular business documents and news; so that continually refreshing and updating their knowledge of business words will help them more. This leads them towards incorporating the necessary terminology into their day-to-day speech and written communications.

Communication in the business world takes place in many ways. Even though communication via email and through other forms of text have become more frequent these days, person-to-person communication still being treated as the best option to connect with clients and partners and to establish genuine and lasting relationships in the profession. Thus, acquiring good communication skills remains as important as competence in the field of written communication when seeking a career in the corporate world. Students who are able to share their thoughts, ideas, and goals with others via any kind of conversation in an effective way are often considered to be more competent, intelligent, and trustworthy. It's important to accept and to practice conversation skills. The skills may be listening or speaking, which enables the receiving of information as well as the presenting of their own ideas and thoughts. Listening to your clients and processing their information demonstrate one's seriousness towards building a better business environment with the help of feedback, respect and teamwork. In his article Wroblewski rightly says that verbal communication is one responsibility where learner cannot delegate, even if he/she wants to. As a small-business owner, learners need to be called upon to communicate with employees and clients every day, sometimes all day long – and learner have to be at the top of r game or risk being

misunderstood. Fortunately, communication is one discipline in which learners can get better at with practice. When you consider the importance of communication in the business world, you may find even more incentive to do so. (Wroblewski, 2019)

How much vocabulary should a student know in order to be a better communicator? What words need to be learnt first? What vocabulary is most beneficial for an undergraduate technical student? The English teachers have been trying to answer these questions of the students and there is no fixed number for the teachers of English to provide as there are various factors involved in it. It is observed that the vocabulary taught in classroom is insufficient and it is increasingly falling in creation of any interest among the learners for further improvement. One of the reasons may be that such a list doesn't motivate the learners and at times discourages them from practicing.

The use or adoption of English may pose both linguistic and cultural problems especially for non-native speakers. Furthermore, in the specific context of Business communication the correct use of English plays a significant role in terms of successful communication. All too often the incorrect use of English, both in terms of accents or pronunciations grammar and functions, could create communication problems and even misunderstanding.....Business English, stress should not only be laid upon purely grammatical points, but should also focus on language functions and cultural issues in order to frame business communication as a kind of mediation between cultures. Students may be proficient in English but still fail to use it in appropriate situations (Vanessa, 2009)

Technical undergraduates may possess a considerable amount of technical vocabulary and terminology relevant to their academic and personal spheres. Presently, English teachers provide vocabulary instruction that meets the personal communication needs of students effectively. For technical students, mastering communicative English is essential for navigating job interviews, participating in group discussions and JAMs (Just a Minute sessions), writing technical reports, and accessing research information. While this equips them with vital skills for communication within their field, a grasp of business vocabulary enhances their prospects in specific professional domains.

Proficiency in business vocabulary not only aids in securing better opportunities within their respective areas but also enables these students to thrive in both local and foreign job markets. Success in their careers is attributed, in part, to their adeptness in business



terminology. It is imperative to evaluate the current prescribed materials for learning business vocabulary, considering their merit and utility. Additionally, cultural nuances associated with these materials should be identified, aligning with the prevailing trends in business communication.

It is crucial for students to discern the distinctions between general-purpose vocabulary and business-oriented vocabulary, acknowledging the significance of each in the context of contemporary business communication.

## CONCLUSION

The key conclusions drawn from the discussion and study are as follows: i) A majority of the respondents emphasized that effective English writing, whether in the form of emails or letters, necessitates the most appropriate usage of grammar. ii) When condensing information, it is crucial to employ specific vocabulary to ensure conciseness. iii) The use of proper sentence structure is essential, and a lack of practice in both speaking and writing contributes to challenges.

Addressing these issues within an organization or educational institution can significantly impact the learners' performance. As Abrams (1959) aptly illustrates, words like "home" not only denote a place of residence but also connote privacy, intimacy, or coziness. Many students lack a conceptual understanding of words, and efforts should be made to raise their awareness. Additionally, students often possess a limited outlook on certain words, interpreting them narrowly. Providing learners with a variety of exercises can help them practice and comprehend the diverse meanings of a given word. Considering the latest teaching methodologies and materials, there is a need for the evolution of new vocabulary teaching methods. Ultimately, comprehensive research in the field of vocabulary teaching is essential for both teachers and students, recognizing that vocabulary is a critical aspect of the learning process.

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