

SOWMYA K.N. “ SCOPE, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF BLENDED METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS.” THESIS. DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH ST. THOMAS’ COLLEGE, THRISSUR, UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT, 2019.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The present chapter encompasses with the course of actions adopted to carry out the research. It comprises of theoretical analysis, methods and principles associated with the study. As mentioned in the first chapter, plenty of researches have been conducted regarding communication skills and its related field. Studies in connection with different teaching methods and its practical application at various levels of learning also have done over the years. On the other hand the need to enhance communication skill of engineering students by adopting blended method and analysing the implications are relatively less. This research attempts to work on the area where only a few studies have been undertaken and investigated so far. The online component Moodle has not been fused with classroom teaching in most of the blended method based studies for language learning. The implication of communication skills on engineering students and its real significance over the learners can be evaluated by proper implementation of the framed methodology.

This research employs both quantitative and qualitative data sources- for qualitative, personal interaction and direct observation and for quantitative, questionnaire and test paper. Personal interaction and questionnaire analysis have been carried out throughout the study. The sample group had been observed thoroughly to analyse the changes during the study. At the end, a test was conducted for participants to evaluate the success of the research programme. Both the students and faculties handling communication paper were regularly contacted. The

investigator visited several institutions of different areas as part of the research. Based on personal interaction, students were classified into several groups and implementation of method was based on the classification. Learner's interest to involve in a new learning style was the relevant criterion for the grouping. Students from different colleges were clustered into one online group as in a classroom.

Teaching faculties were given broad plan about the study to make them realise the relevance of enhancing communication skills. An interactive session was arranged with each corresponding faculties to understand their background and teaching style. As they did not have a prescribed text or suggested teaching method, each institution followed individual style as per expediency. During the research programme they were introduced to recent trends in teaching and learning. Those who were unaware of technology assisted instruction were given orientation. In each institution, regular interaction was done with students at different levels of study. Introduction about the research was given during the personal interaction. Teaching and evaluation was carried out through online and offline mode.

Pilot study

The pilot study in order to evaluate the time, cost, feasibility and effect of the method prior to the full scale research has helped to develop the research design of the experiment. A pilot study is usually carried out on members of the relevant population, but not on those who will perform the role of final sample. The ultimate sample is avoided as it may influence the behaviour of research subjects if they have already been indulged in the research. This kind of preventive measure helped to get more absolute result.

Pilot study was conducted to test and confirm the procedures, tools and ideas to be adopted in main study. The purpose was to confirm the effectiveness of blended method in English language teaching for engineering students. The selected group for pilot study included ten members. All of them were first year engineering students and were interested to improve communication skills. It was ensured that they had internet access and familiar with different learning websites. They were given awareness about the details of blended learning and how to involve in online and classroom activities. Several online learning websites were introduced and motivated them to do different courses as per interest.

Data related to their communication skill were collected through personal interaction and questionnaire and observed their attitude towards language learning, online education and classroom activities. The questionnaire included twenty five multiple choice questions and divided it into different sections like; language skills, technology, learning habits and online learning. The observation pattern was common for all the ten learners. Analysis of the observed data explained that they were unaware of the possibilities of language learning through online courses and potential of technology as a learning tool remained unexplored. Even those who heard about online learning websites did not try to attempt or experience online course. Instructors included power point presentation and projector in teaching but they too neglected or did not concern to mix online possibilities with classroom teaching.

Pilot study supported to have more clear perspective about blended learning and it gave practical experience regarding implementation. The different levels of teaching were analysed and collected feedback from the learners to make necessary changes in the research programme. It was rearranged in such a way to rectify the problems encountered in pilot study. In practice session of the experiment, more

activities were included for each communication skill and ensured participation of every learner. The researcher decided to give more awareness about blended method and its strategies before implementing the session to the experimental group.

Research Problems

Identifying problems are the initial step to propose solution. Communication skills training are not given importance in the engineering curriculum and students are unaware about the relevance of improving linguistic skills. The research programme was organised to facilitate the learners to improve communication ability through blended method which may offer ample time to practice various activities.

The identified problems during the study were;

- Inadequate teaching hours for Communication skills paper.
- Lack of trained teachers and proper teaching method.
- Poor enthusiasm in students regarding non-engineering subjects.
- Neglecting the relevance of communication skills in professional courses.
- Lack of motivation to improve linguistic skills.
- Unexplored possibilities of technology to improve communication skills.
- Unaware about the global opportunities for which communication skills is essential.
- Not having enough opportunities to participate in literary activities.

Variables

Independent variable

In this study the two independent variables employed on which the researcher had control in the research setting were;

- online teaching
- classroom teaching

Dependent variable

Dependent variable exhibits the effect of manipulation of the independent variable and is dependent on the latter one. In the present research dependent variables are;

- Listening skill
- Speaking skill
- Reading skill
- Writing skill

Objectives

With respect to review of literature and identified research problems, certain objectives were formulated;

- To explore the possibilities of technology in teaching and learning.
- To introduce innovative methods like Blended method in teaching and learning of communication skills.
- To encourage the students to improve linguistic skills.
- To make the students aware that communication skill is one of the employability skills.
- To develop the habit of self learning.

Working plan

Table 3.1

| Stages | Activity |
|---------------|--|
| Stage I | Institution visit |
| Stage II | Interacting with the faculty |
| Stage III | Interacting with the students |
| Stage IV | Introducing Blended method |
| Stage V | Conducting classroom activities |
| Stage VI | Conducting online activities |
| Stage VII | Facilitating the concerned faculty to reinforce the activities |

Stage I- Visiting the institution

Personal interaction had played an important role in understanding the communication skills of students and different methods employed by teachers. The investigator visited several engineering colleges to interact with students and corresponding subject faculties. As blended method is a new term, in the preliminary stage it had been explained clearly. Different components of blend were introduced to make them familiar with the concept. The relevance of improving communication skills and how blended method would be helpful to accomplish this had been stressed throughout the session. In each institution response was positive to reassure the

confidence level of the researcher. Until last year, the Humanities and communication skills paper was allotted in first year syllabus. Engineering courses under different universities in Kerala have been affiliated to a single entity, Kerala Technological University (KTU) from 2015 onwards. At present the first year students all over the state have registration under KTU and other students under the corresponding universities. To get a uniform group, the first year students alone were considered for the investigation.

Stage II- Interacting with the faculty

Inter relating with the concerned faculties played vital role in the study as they will be mediating the experiment in the researcher's absence. Humanities and Communication skills paper was prescribed for engineering curriculum in all the universities in the previous curriculum still the govt. has not sanctioned a post for Communication faculty in engineering colleges. In spite of this certain colleges have appointed qualified faculties as guest lecturers or in self financing colleges as permanent staffs. Presently, KTU has not recommended communication skills as a subject in the curriculum and has suggested practicing language lab alone. Institutions have arranged communication classes for the first year students during remedial teaching and first semester students alone are included for this remedial class. The faculties have prepared own syllabus to teach as per their notion and available teaching atmosphere. Those who are qualified in English have general awareness about how to teach language and they are giving emphasis to phonetics, basics of grammar and communication skill based activities like seminar, extempore, debate and group discussion. Faculties from other streams do not have a clue about language teaching and they are handling classes like searching in the darkness. As the hour is scheduled under remedial teaching, each batch will be getting only one hour per

week. Public holidays will further reduce the allotted time. Faculties face time constraint and lack of guidelines for teaching as obstacles throughout the year. The research was intended to intrigue into these aspects in detail and the concerned staff member was given a questionnaire. It aimed to understand the details in concern with their teaching methods and professional background.

Stage III- Interacting with the students

The primary objective of interacting with students was to give awareness about the importance of improving communication skills. Conversation with faculties helped to get an idea in general about students' attitude and level of communication competency. At some stage of the interface, it was evident that students knew the relevance of communication skills in technical and technological fields and they extended positive response towards the session. Learners showed enthusiasm to know about a new learning program. In all the institutions, the concerned faculty introduced about the researcher's topic and the purpose behind the interaction. 50 students were selected from different branches as members of the experimental group from five colleges. The students belong to different streams like; Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Communications Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering and Production Engineering. The investigator raised certain general questions to get an overview about the activities with which they were familiar and inured to do in the classroom.

Stage IV- Introducing Blended Method



Fig. 3.1

Familiarising teaching method at initial stage helps to get adopted quickly. Students were given an outline of blended method by showing power point presentation. They were well explained about communication skills, different types of it and barriers in communication. Blended method was introduced as a combination of online teaching and direct classroom teaching. It was explained that these two learning types could be combined and used for language teaching. Students were introduced to online learning websites like www.nptel.com which delivers audio and video classes based on engineering curriculum and run by NIT and IIT professors. The website covered more than seventy subjects related to the engineering stream. Other sites like Coursera, WizIQ and edX also offered free online courses. Those who want to attend courses can create an account and register for the course as per interest. Students were motivated to create an account in online learning websites and to

register for multidisciplinary courses. General activity of youngsters by using internet is for creating accounts in social networking sites and searching information in Google. Apart from online learning, students were introduced to Educational networking which is the use of social networking sites for educational purpose and M-Learning which is learning by using mobile phones. A general list of useful mobile applications was given to them. After creating awareness about these sites, students were asked to fill a questionnaire and it covered areas related to their learning habits, internet usage, instructor's attitude and level of communication skills.

Stage V- Conducting classroom activities

The next stage was conducting classroom activities and it was the core part of the research. The students from five institutions with different personal and educational backgrounds were considered for the research included. As the engineering allotment is state wide, students belong to all the districts are mixed up in every institution. Regarding school education, students complete higher secondary from CBSE or ICSE or State syllabus either in English medium or in Malayalam medium. The three systems follow different approaches for teaching and learning. Compared to Central Board Syllabus State syllabus gives wide scope for activities. Activity based learning is one of the maxims of State Board and students are trained according to that from primary level onwards. Central Board pays more focus on instruction and students get lesser free time compare to students from other systems. They may have comparatively good fluency over language as they are using English language to learn all the subjects. Each institution follows different strategies for training; while the interaction with students it was evident that their schooling and the strategies followed there had been influenced their communication and personal skills.

Learners who have inborn talents can modify and polish their abilities through proper training and institutions can offer excellent platform to stage their skills. To substantiate this concept, the general classroom activities were group discussion, debate, role play, word games, various written assignments and doing presentation on a given topic. Two types of students were there; one group felt that while doing professional course they have to focus on technological aspects rather than spending time on communication activities and another group expressed genuine interest in activities and they felt it helps to relax in the midst of tight schedule. In the same class itself, researcher could find students with these two dissimilar attitudes. After the introductory session different activities were scheduled to implement. With the help of other faculties, group discussion and debate were conducted in the preliminary session. In the next class the activity was extempore and role play. Through different sessions the selected fifty students were made to participate in more than three activities. Some students were introvert and they hesitated to come forward and speak up and needed repeated effort to interact with others. Another group of students were very active and took initiative to conduct the sessions. A few had good general knowledge and they excelled in debate and group discussion. The faculties were requested to carry out the activities in the next classes also as communication is a skill and requires regular practice to excel. After interaction it was identified that students are familiar with these activities and majority are participating actively and they needed opportunity and support to enhance their linguistic skills.

Activities

Table 3.2

| No | Item | Aim | Objective |
|----|---------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Group discussion | To improve speaking and listening skills | To consider the different perspectives of the topic To create team spirit To arrive at a common conclusion |
| 2 | Extempore | To develop speaking skill and presentation skill | To create awareness about different areas To practice quick presentation |
| 3 | Debate | To improve speaking and listening skills | To examine the pros and cons of the topic To create competitive attitude |
| 4 | Role play | To advance speaking skill and presentation skill | To experience the different roles in real life To use imagination and creativity |
| 5 | Paragraph and essay writing | To improve writing and reading skills | To be familiar with written tasks To know how to organise and present ideas in written scripts |
| 6 | Technical writing- memo, letter | To enhance writing skill | To be acquainted with different styles of letters and memos |
| 7 | CV& Resume | To boost presentation skill | To prepare attractive and reliable profile |

a) Group Discussion**Fig. 3.2**

On a daily basis we involve in many discussions with family, friends and colleagues and developing group discussion skill is considered as one of the necessary communication abilities. Group discussions can be conducted for various purposes like, decision making, problem solving, to share opinion or to formulate a plan or idea. While having discussion, the participants will discuss about all the aspects, pros and cons of the selected topic. Listening and speaking are the main linguistic skills focused on this activity. Along with it several sub skills are also improved; ability to analyse, persuade, to control emotions and to support each other. Before discussion the topic has to be analysed in detail and participants have to control emotions and preconceived notions for being unprejudiced. During discussion participants should maintain mutual respect and have to avoid interrupting others while speaking. One

can raise argument without irritating or hurting other participants. These basic manners can be best learnt only by practice.

In each institution, group discussion was conducted as part of the study. A group of ten or twelve students was selected randomly. Regarding the topic, students were given freedom to suggest topics and gave preparation time to think and plan the discussion. While selecting the topic the current issues were given more prominence. The investigator provided general instructions about time limit, importance of active participation, use of appropriate language, audibility, body language, eye contact and mannerisms or gestures. Students were informed that, they can substantiate ideas by quoting suitable examples and relevant similar issues. The researcher took the role of moderator. Generally the discussion was for ten minutes and those who did not participate in the discussion and remained as audience were asked to observe and evaluate the performance of each participant. Once the discussion is over both the researcher and audience gave feedback and suggestions on each participant. The group members were given opportunity for self evaluation also. This helped to identify their mistakes and how it can be clarified during the next presentation.

The participants were asked to sit in a semi circle shape so that each participant will have face to face contact and the audience can view all the group members. Each participant was allowed to introduce themselves. While having discussion members were asked to clarify if they are not clear about the other participant's opinion. After discussing the various aspects of the topic some general conclusions were drawn out at the end of each session. Both linguistic items and knowledge about the topic were given focus in the discussion. Group discussion is one of the important elements in job interviews and interviews for professional course. By conducting group discussion we can analyse the candidate's general

awareness, analytical skill, presentation skill and how co-operative will be in a group. Rather than learning theoretical aspects, these gestures can be improved by regular practice. The researcher showed videos of group discussions and asked them to view more on internet as watching it will be a motivation for the learners. Being a facilitator, the researcher attempted to encourage silent learners and tried to control who did not give chance for others to speak. The Communication skill faculty was requested to conduct similar activities in the future.

Usually the students are silent or inactive in classrooms and the class will run by the monotonous speech of the lecturer. It is difficult to maintain focus and interest by adopting this kind of monotonous way. Group discussion helps to hear another voice as well as different view point from the participants. Whatever may be the topic, students were asked to analyse and find answers for 5 'wh' questions (what, when, where, why, who) and how or to the maximum problems. This kind of guidelines provided more focus while discussion. When the group members tried to explain, it was easy to recognise the level of students' understanding and their presentation skill. As a moderator, the researcher clarified the aspects which they were not clear or familiar and those who remained as audience were asked to report the points discussed so far. For their convenience major points were noted down on the board by the moderator. Two or three students were called upon randomly to read out the report so that they will do the report writing with seriousness. Thus all the students were involved in the activity. Evaluation part was always focused on as it makes the students more alert and they are ensured that their work is being assessed.

In group discussion all the members have to share their opinions on the topic and by monitoring their activities the observer can identify participants' attitude and presentation skill. Candidates are judged by their ability to initiate and conclude

discussion, make their opinions heard, speak audibly with good pronunciation and grammar, and behave politely without irritating or hurting others. Generally the focus will be on the topic being discussed rather than the norms of speaking. As the primary aim of the research is to improve their communication skills focus was more on presentation style than their knowledge. Focusing on two features simultaneously is a tedious task for learners and they will not be able to manage to sequence ideas in proper presentation style. So the initial task was to make them speak however it was made clear that in real situation both aspects have to be given equal importance.

The topics given for discussion were examination system, current education system, social media, technology, old age homes and entrepreneurship. In one group only ten or twelve students were there and the activity was repeated with other students to accommodate majority of them. In some sessions the role of moderator was assigned to a student to motivate leadership spirit. Students were made to realise that after entering to a job they may have to work in a group and have to co-operate with the team members and can consider these discussions as a mock session for the future purpose. The content knowledge, presentation, body language and mannerisms were evaluated after the presentation. While interacting with the concerned faculty it was confirmed that students are participating in all the activities. Those students were inactive in the initial sessions were given topic for discussion in one class before itself, so that they can prepare even after going home. This attempt was proved to be effective as they took effort to express themselves in the next class. It was observed that group discussion can be included as an activity to improve communication skills if conducted with well defined objectives.

b) Extempore**Fig. 3.3**

In a professional environment employees have to attend meetings, make presentations, participate in discussions and work with groups. To prepare the learners of the experimental group, extempore, which is similar to a brain storming session was another activity conducted for students. This act aids to think about the topic and to voice ideas in front of others. Oral communication skill is necessary in both personal and professional life. Extempore is an unrehearsed speech delivered without preparation and it requires great effort to deliver an extempore successfully as it has to be spontaneous moreover with little groundwork. Corporate world considers extempore as one of the evaluation techniques while recruiting employees. At present, organisations pay more prominence on employing wholesome individuals who have analytical skill and resort to wise and quick action. Employees have to regularly interact with top-level management and clients with utmost ease and resourcefulness

apart from completing individual responsibilities. Creating general awareness and competent to prepare any topic is a fundamental quality to participate and excel in extempore. Updating on a regular basis of what is happening around the world is an essential criterion for active participation. All these primary information was given before starting the session.

In day to day life we involve in different communication activities like listening, information exchange, advising, persuading, instructing and group discussion for problem-solving. More than written communication frequently we indulge in oral communication in interpersonal, group level and organisational level. It was identified that students were tensed regarding expressing their knowledge than learning it. Standing in front of the audience, organising ideas in a sequential manner and expressing it clearly appeared to be a tedious task for learners. Oral communication can be of two types; one is done with clear agenda and thorough preparation as in a formal meeting and the second kind is spontaneous and the speaker will not get time to plan or prepare. Extempore motivated the students to practice the second variety of oral communication. As in any other oral communication speaker has to take care of pronunciation, accent, audibility, clarity, eye contact, body language and mannerisms. One has to be presentable and calm in front of the audience as a tensed look will create the impact that the speaker is not confident about what he says. Adding suitable examples or citing relevant incidents may create clear understanding. Students were provided with such kind of general tips for improvement.

Oral communication is a combination of several factors like understanding by active listening, non-verbal communication style and conciseness of topic. The general assumption is that students pursuing professional course like engineering are aware of basic linguistic rules and therefore teaching speaking skill is irrelevant at

that stage. It was observed that this is a misconception and there are lot of students even do not know how to write a leave application. The challenge of the experiment was to identify the needs of the individual learners and the best way to figure out their difficulties was to monitor and understand how the learners perform a task in the class. A few students were called randomly and gave easy and familiar topics to speak in a few words and many of them faced difficulties due to lack of confidence, lack of familiarity with the topic, stage fear and introvert nature. To acquire such skills, task-based approach was the effective method. As a beginning, one day before itself a list of twenty topics including shopping, in a hospital, in airport and attending a ceremony were given and asked the learners to prepare all the topics. This made them familiar with topics and they felt relaxed. Once they were confident to address the audience, as in real extempore, the topic was given on the spot and the student had to speak instantaneously. Repeated practice motivated them to update their knowledge and to express ideas within a short span of time effectively.

The objectives behind conducting extempore in classroom were to build confidence to speak in English, to provide learners an experience of spontaneous interaction, to give a chance to benefit from noticing how others express similar ideas, to engage learners in using language purposefully and cooperatively, to make learners participate in a complete interaction, to offer chances to try out different communication strategies and make the learners confident that they can achieve communication goals. More than practising in front of mirror communication skills can be improved better by interacting with others in live situations as suggestions and feedback from the audience may act as guidelines to develop further. Acquiring communication effectiveness is the purpose behind practising different activities. Teaching language is out of question at college level and what teachers can do is

make the students to improve vocabulary and motivate to achieve communication skills. The prime focus of engineering students will be on the core subjects and it was a tedious task to draw attention on communication classes.

In extempore, students do not know beforehand which topic they have to choose from, for this reason, presenting extempore require both language proficiency and presence of mind. Formulating ideas and presenting it logically and instantly to the audience is the real challenge for the speaker. To confront all this requires both confidence and familiarity with a wide range of vocabulary and linguistic structures. In those institutions, where language lab was functioning, the students were taken to laboratory and played several audios and videos to make them familiar with speech style and presentation techniques. While one student was making the presentation, others were asked to evaluate them. A score sheet was created for this purpose including features like language fluency, topic explanation, sequencing ideas, audibility, pronunciation and body language and the mark has to be put out of 30. Along with the students, the researcher also evaluated the performances. As a positive note, certain students requested for a second chance for presentation expecting that they can do better than previous performance.

In group discussion, audience's attention will be on all the performers and every one can speak in a relaxed sitting posture but in extempore focus will be on a single person and it is high responsibility for the speaker. Students needed more time to be comfortable with extempore speech than group discussion. Learners viewed it comfortable to speak for 2 or 3 minutes without preparation, on a given topic if the topics are within their areas of interest.

Initially they were hesitant to come forward and speak up, but the training altered their attitude and it appeared to be an interesting task and they acknowledged that performing extempore make them more confident to speak in English while participating in other oral performances.

c) Debate**Fig. 3.4**

The purpose behind learning a language is to use it meaningfully in appropriate situations. In the research, the next strategy to make the learners capable to use the language as per needs was to adopt Content Based Instruction (CBI). Debate plays an important role in CBI as these tasks definitely integrate content, language, and strategy objectives. Activities like debate necessitate students to master content and gain conceptual knowledge, while using language in meaningful ways. It involves critical thinking, give emphasis to research skills, enhance public speaking skills, promote autonomous and collaborative learning, and encourage positive assessment. Conducting debate in classroom has many advantages; rather than group discussion, in debate there will be more competitive spirit, since it is like argument, both groups will always find ways to oppose the other group and to substantiate the ideas of their own group. The real aim is not to fail the opposite group but to find the pros and cons of the topic through healthy arguments. In future, students may need all

these linguistic skills and activities like this will prepare them to face those real life situations.

To initiate the task, general instructions about debate were given and then selected two groups of students, each group included six students and they were made to sit in a semi circle form so that each member would have face to face contact and the audience also could view all the participants. For learners' convenience general topics of their interest like grading system, reservation system and age of marriage, whether social networking sites boon or ban? Do we need reservation in education system? Do we need politics inside the campus? Urbanisation and its aftermaths were selected. Participants were given five minutes to think and organise their ideas. It was highlighted that along with participation they have to take care of body language, eye contact, audibility and clarity in presentation. The participants were guided to respect each other and not to interfere or hurt while the other member is speaking. Like in group discussion, initiating the session and supporting co- members is considered as a positive note in debate also. The session was for ten minutes and the researcher took the role of moderator. The audience were also asked to observe and evaluate the performance. As the debate will be conducting again with a new topic, those who watched the session also showed keen interest as in next session, audience will be the participants. Debate can be considered as a problem solving method also. All the aspects of the topic will be evaluating critically in debate so one reach to justifiable conclusion after the sitting. One needs in depth knowledge on the issue to argue and validate the view point. This skill is essential to present the findings of a study which will be useful in future as engineers.

From ancient period onwards the general notion of learning a foreign language was to learn the rules behind the language. Sometimes those who know the grammar rules well may not be able to make use of the language to convince others or to explain ideas. Participating in events like debate will make them confident to argue and fix on to their views. In many conversations participants may have different points and opinions about the topic. The techniques and strategies to perform can be learned by observing and listening to other debates helps to understand how to speak and defend own ideas while performing. For this purpose students were shown some videos. As it is like a training session one has to learn the basic manners to be followed in debate. Participating in debates is the best way to platform the skill and show how well informed you are about the topic and the capability to convince others.

After interacting with the faculty in charge of placement cell, it was evident that most of the candidates showed poor performance in debate while attending interviews. Even those who scored good result in written examination found it difficult to excel in performance based tests. In personal interview, one way or the other they manage to express ideas by thorough preparation of the topic and with a well organised self introduction. In debate and group discussion they will be getting the topic on the spot and will not get time to prepare and this makes them less confident to speak up. Those who had language fluency and general awareness about things happening around the world could deliver better presentation. Repeated practice was suggested to improve presentation skill and to make confident them confident.

Students follow different styles for learning and instructors have to adopt different strategies while teaching. Especially in language teaching one method will not be the ultimate solution for teaching. Adopting multiple methods will improve

linguistic skills and a single activity will not be enough for classroom practice. Different students will be interested in diverse activities. Debate is an activity which involves critical thinking and it nurtures and assures active engagement of students. Not only analysing and arguing, students will learn how to clarify ideas and present it clearly before the audience. Simultaneously it develops speaking skill, listening skill and critical thinking skills. Apart from language learning, debate can be conducted in other Engineering subject classrooms also. Subject like Mechanics which is based on concepts was selected for debate and for more clarifications and assistance the concerned faculty was requested to be present there during debate. Students acknowledged that it lead to better understanding than just hearing the theories from the lecturer. When they were asked to write the scientific idea which was chosen for debate, they could write it more clearly than the previous attempt.

The theory of Constructivism points out that we generate knowledge and meaning by the active interaction between experience and idea. It was found that information and facts which have learned and even memorised, will stay passive unless it is used or reproduced and will not entail active building of knowledge. Learning diminishes if the student takes passive role and remains inactive in classrooms. All these aspects lead to the importance of conducting activities to transform the learners from passive to active mode. To cater the students' attention teacher can include different activities. Debate was suggested as an activity across the curriculum as it was found to be successful in other subjects also. For better and deep learning of course contents, debate can be used as an effective tool. To create more interest, a score board was maintained during the debate and the moderator marked points for each view and if one group failed to counter argue or contradict one's own view, negative point was also marked. This made the participants more active. The

final score of each group was displayed on the board. The students who remained as audience were asked to find the best performer. By this way, debate was an exciting and challenging activity for learners. After few sessions students gave the feedback that they are now trained to think multi aspects of the topic and are interested and enthusiastic to identify issues. Activity like debate encourages interaction among students and develops multi faceted thinking and comprehension skill.

d) Role play



Fig. 3.5

Several approaches have been adopted from ancient period onwards to teach language and one of them was Activity based learning or Task based learning. Tasks are the core unit of language teaching in this approach. Linguists consider it as a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching as both the approaches have similarities in basic concepts. The fundamental ideas of Task based learning are; activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning, activities in which language is used to carry out meaningful tasks promote language learning. Tasks are proposed as useful vehicles for applying these principles. Theatre activities such as role play and dramatisation can be considered as meaningful tasks to be used in language learning. Role play, simulation and drama are the terms associated with acting and language learning. Role play is enacting a particular role in an imaginary situation, simulation is taking the role of a character which may happen

in real life and drama is depicting an incident or situation. These activities can be implemented effectively if there is thorough preparation and good coordination between teachers and students.

Students were inactive in classrooms and remained as passive listeners. For this reason, it was planned to introduce different kinds of activities to ensure their dynamic participation. To involve all the students, the audience were assigned to give feedback for the performance. Getting an immediate response was an opportunity for further improvement. Regular participation will develop pronunciation, vocabulary and usages. An atmosphere in which teacher and students are comfortable was the primary requirement to conduct such activities and students' need and requirements were considered while selecting the situation. Teachers can select an act that will arouse the interest of students gives an opportunity to practice the learned subject. One way to keep the role play interesting is to let the students choose the situation themselves. They were asked to suggest themes that are familiar and students referred to books and watched other performances to get more options.

Seminars and conferences are being organised by several institutions on the topics related to theatre, role play and dramatisation. In connection to this, the researcher has attended and presented a paper on role play and participation throughout the session helped to explore innovative aspects of theatre. Factual preparation and concrete description of roles offer clear picture for the students and bringing real life situations will be helpful to understand how to behave in such circumstance. To get the correct pronunciation and accent several video clips were showed and students watched it as model. The class was divided into different groups to manage conveniently. As home assignments, students were asked to read several books and to write their own script to be enacted at their turn. Selected situations for

role play were a doctor, shop keeper, teacher and politician. The preparation enhanced not only speaking skill but reading and writing skills of the learners also improved.

After the performance, time was spent on debriefing and it was not to point out or scrutinise to correct mistakes. After role play, the students may feel satisfied for using their linguistic knowledge in a useful manner and the sense of fulfilment will disappear if every mistake is being analysed. The aim of feedback was to discuss what had happened in the role play and what they have learned. Drama and role play are learner centred activities and the teacher has the role of a mentor or a director. It integrates language skills in a natural way as one has to listen, read and comprehend during the preparation. The preparation combines both verbal and non verbal aspects of language, thus bringing together both mind and body, and restoring the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning. Drama and role play bridge the gap between thought and expression, rote memorising and real usage. It was observed that participation in such activities foster self awareness and confidence.

e) Interview skills

One of the major objectives of education is to achieve job and it was relevant to give orientation on interview skills. After completing studies attending interview is the stepping stone to enter into a profession and along with subject knowledge communication skill is essential to excel in interview. Realising the situation, the research focused to improve the presentation skill of learners. Excellent presentation focuses on elements like pronunciation, speed, clarity, audibility and most essentially confidence level of the speaker about the subject matter. By concentrating on these aspects interviewee can do an enhanced oral presentation. Along with oral features body language has to be maintained in a proper manner. Generally it is considered

that the interviewer may observe the candidate from the moment candidate enters to the doorstep and the learners were cautioned to concentrate on the manner of walking, sitting posture and crucially to avoid unwanted mannerisms and gestures. Dress code is also another significant part while going to attend interviews. Learners were advised to avoid colourful costumes and gaudy accessories. Formal dress and minimum make up will be suitable for such kind of official visit. In short, while preparing for interview the candidate has to focus on many elements and it needs overall development.

Mock interview was organised to practice interview skills. Subject experts and placement cell coordinators were included in the interview board and this made the session more realistic. Interview was conducted in two levels; personal and subject oriented and it was scheduled for fifteen to twenty minutes. This session was arranged in front of the classroom so that others could observe and appreciate. Both the faculties and students gave feedback to improve. Some students requested a second chance to perform when they realise the mistake and wished to rectify it. The placement coordinators assisted to follow the formal interview style and this made the session more effective. Students found it useful and they responded that it was a like a training session before attending the real interview. Students were suggested to follow formal way of communication and concentrate on body language whenever they do oral presentation.

a) Writing Assignments**Fig. 3.6**

Group discussion, extempore, role play and debate were the activities conducted to improve speaking skill as part of classroom activities. Several sub skills also would be enhanced by practising these acts. The next focus was on to improve writing skill. According to traditional linguists speaking and writing are known as productive skills as these two help to express thought and idea. Several written activities like writing short note, fill in the blanks, letter writing and report writing were included during the session. The basic concepts were thoroughly explained before assigning tasks; whether the passage is too long or short, there should be a beginning, middle and an end. By reading the introductory sentence itself, reader should get a clear idea of what the passage is about. The middle portion is the explanatory part, where the concepts are explained one by one. For more clarity, suitable examples or relevant ideas can be included. In the conclusion or end, the

above mentioned ideas can be summarised or can give a gist of the whole passage, this will help to emphasise the main concepts. Students were reminded that while writing examination also these steps can be adopted.

Organising ideas and presenting it in clear language are the essential factors for a written document. Keeping this order in mind, one can write a rough draft first. Dividing the whole passage into several parts will help to have more clarity. Collecting data related to the topic is also very important. It is not important to collect a large number of reference materials, fundamental aspect is to collect relevant matters according to the topic. Noting down the source of information may help to re-check materials for future reference. Editing and re-writing will make the final draft more refined. Learners were recommended to maintain a working bibliography along with data collection.

Paragraph writing was the first task assigned, students were asked to write a paragraph on a topic as per their interest. The format of beginning, middle and end were asked to follow strictly. The researcher asked to write about their goal in life or about their favourite profession. The next task was assigned to improve note taking skill; while listening to a lecture or reading a book, it is very useful to take down notes. Reader can note down all the relevant points briefly without leaving the connection or can write significant points. Practice will improve note taking skill and these notes can be used for future reference. Initial task is to make a rough draft and to design what all points they have to include and how they can present it in a sequential order. While editing the rough draft one can delete the unimportant idea or include more points, then can move to the final draft. As it is a short paragraph, the total time given was half an hour. This method can be adopted for writing long passages also.

For note taking, three methods are there; a) Outlining, b) Mind mapping, c) Cornell system. The learner can adopt different techniques for outlining; to give hierarchical structure alphabets, numbers, Roman numerals or bullets are used. Outlining is very useful while taking notes from books and presentations, for lectures it has some limitations if the speaker is not maintaining connection. In case of books and formal presentation, there is assurance of sequential progress and the reader or audience can find the relationship between ideas. For lectures, the learner has to adopt mind mapping method. As per this system, the central idea is written on the middle of the sheet of paper. When a new topic is introduced, a branch from the centre is drawn and writes the subtopic at the end of the branch, if the subtopic has further divisions, more branches can be drawn further. The advantage is that, if the point is under first heading and we are on the fourth one, we can easily draw it on the first branch. Likewise, if a point connects to two different ideas, by drawing a branch the two ideas can be connected easily.

The Cornell system was another effective method for note taking. It was developed by Walter Pauk, professor of Education at Cornell University, New York. In this method, the sheet of paper will be divided into three different sections; 3.5 inches space from the bottom of a sheet and draw a line across the width of the page to mark this space. Draw another line to top, about 2.5 inches from the left- hand edge of the sheet. The largest section is the note taking column, in this space one can follow outlining or mind mapping as per convenience. The column on the left is 'recall column', here hints, questions about the corresponding item of the note taken can be written. The third and last column is the summary column, where the summary of the whole notes can be written in two or three sentences. Students were asked to practice different outlining methods in note taking and to develop this as habit

whenever read a book or attend class. Along with good comprehension, writing skill also will enhance by this act.

a) Different Outlining methods

- | | | | |
|----|------|----|---|
| 1. | i. | a) | * |
| 2. | ii. | b) | * |
| 3. | iii. | c) | * |
| 4. | iv. | d) | * |
| 5. | v. | e) | * |

b) Mind Mapping

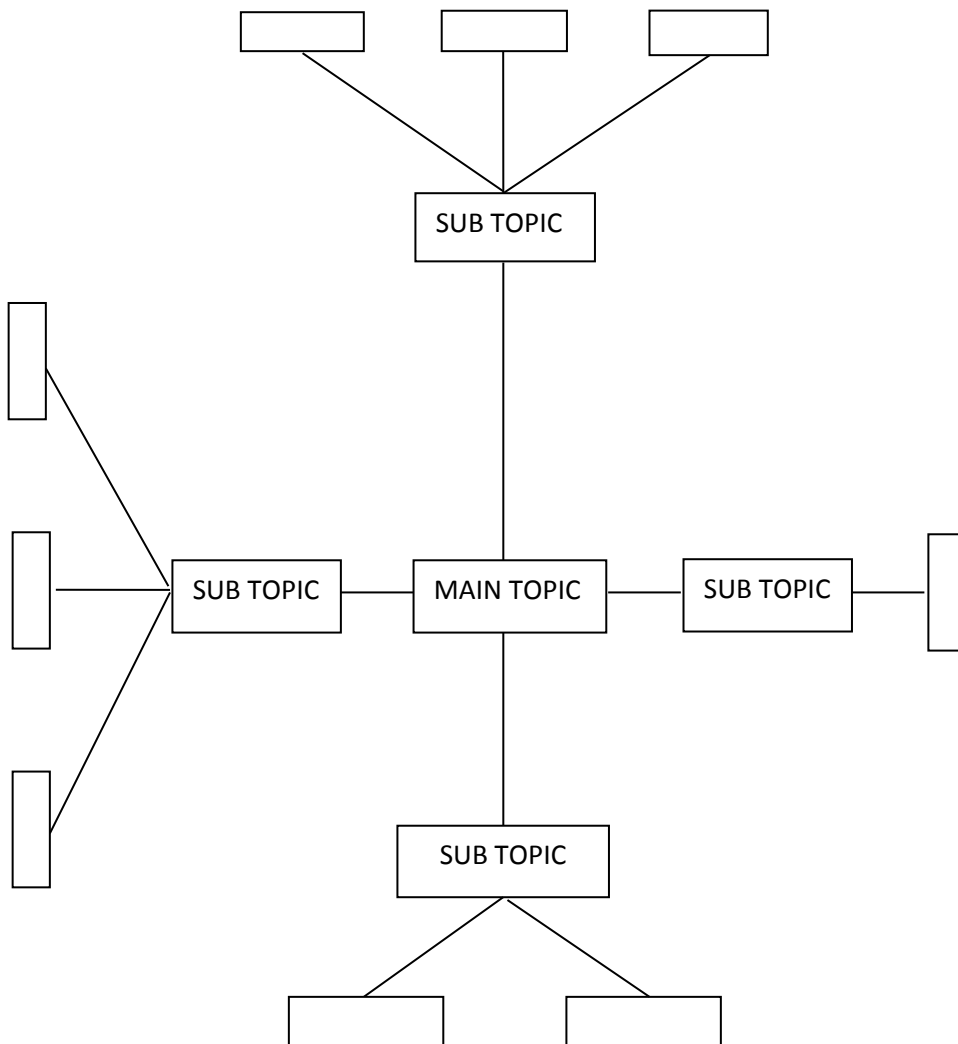


Fig. 3.7

c) The Cornell System

Table 3.3

| | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| RECALL COLUMN | NOTE TAKING COLUMN |
| | SUMMARY COLUMN |

b) Summarising

Briefing helps to understand the core content easily and it is a skill to condense the matter without losing essential points. Summarising was another task assigned to practice written skill. It leads the learners to comprehend the text materials and to reproduce it in own words. Summarising notes helps to reduce the text to main points. While preparing for exams it is very useful to maintain summarised versions of reference materials. A good summary gives clear idea regarding what the text or article is about. In journals, there will be abstracts which gives clue concerning the whole article and in that context abstracts are similar to summaries. To get an overall idea about summarising, the students were asked to read several abstracts or plot summaries of novels. In school level, students have to summarise a given passage in language exams. Two common mistakes commit in that situation are; either writing down everything word by word or a few sentences or forgetting to write important points and finally it will be too little to be helpful. Making good summary is a tedious task and only by practice one can acquire this skill.

Students were given a newspaper article to summarise. All of them were assigned the same article so that it will be easy to compare and evaluate. In textbooks the key points are either in bold letters or highlighted by some other methods. In a well written article, usually each paragraph will have at least one important point. Learners were asked to mark out the important points by underlining it or by using highlighter. The next step was to write down the underlined sections in their own words. The general concept is that if the chapter is of 2000 words, summary has to be around 200 words. From a good newspaper article reader should get answers for 5 'wh' questions (what, when, why, where, who) and how? The investigator suggested that after summarising also these questions or at least to the possible numbers have to be answered, and then only we can claim that the summary is effective.

Instead of summarising, when the student has to write on a new topic, the first work is to do research. To collect data, one can depend on newspaper, book, internet, magazine or can interact with resource person. After collecting information from various resources, the next stage is to combine them and turn into one set of notes and comments. Once the materials are collated, then have to organise the points and can include own ideas while arranging it. Sequencing of materials can be based on chronology, importance or division of sub topics. After organising, the writer can prepare a rough draft to get an outline of the write up and in the next stage is of editing the rough draft for addition or deletion of materials or to change the order of presentation and then can move on to final draft. While writing stage, one has to consider certain aspects like; how long the essay has to be? Whether it is analytical, descriptive or chronological? Who is going to read it? Analysing these aspects will be helpful to make the writing more effective. The researcher explained these concepts clearly, so that learners can explore and practice it while doing written assignments.

The different stages of writing are easily represented by the acronym ‘CODER’ - **C**ollect your ideas, **O**rganise your ideas, **D**rafting, **E**ditting the draft, **R**evising the draft. Based on the topic, materials can be collected from different resources. Noting down the list of reference materials may be helpful for future reference and clarifications. According to the relevance or chronological order the materials can be organised in a particular manner. At the drafting stage, ideas can be noted down devoid of bothering about the language and tone of a formal description. The next stage is of editing the rough draft, either one can seek the help of subject experts or peer group members for suggestions to improve. The writer can also do self editing by referring various resources. After revising the edited draft, the final stage is to write the fair draft. The final writing up can be typed or handwritten based on the situation. In formal occasions it is advisable to type and submit the content. Irrespective of subjects, learners were asked to summarise several materials as it will help for exam preparation and better understanding. They were also assigned to summarise speech and distribute among classmates to evaluate. The corresponding teacher was suggested to evaluate and comment on the learners’ writing. Summaries prepared on prescribed syllabus were made available to everyone by uploading it on Moodle. In this way classroom learning and online learning were integrated simultaneously.

c) Writing Memos

The next intention was to introduce several formal written communication tools and one of it was memos. In office and business communication, day to day information has to be sent to specific group of people. Memos are the simplest form of written material and are written like letters, but are different in two aspects. One is that, memos are not meant for one particular person and are therefore less impersonal;

secondly, format is also less formal when compared to a business letter. Memos can be of two types; short memo and a detailed one. The researcher provided adequate samples for the students to refer and asked them to write on an imaginary situation like a memo written by an institution director addressing to non- teaching staff members.

Table 3.4

TO: (Readers name and designation)

FROM: (Sender's name and designation)

DATE: (Current date)

SUBJECT: (Highlighting what the memo is about)

Delivering the message/ information briefly

Table 3.5

| | |
|--|---|
| Internal Memorandum | |
| TO: (Reader's name and designation) | } |
| FROM: (Sender's name and designation) | |
| DATE: (Current date) | |
| SUBJECT: (Highlighting what the memo is about) | |
| Presents the information/ message in detail. | |
| Yes, I agree | } |
| No, I disagree | |
| Signature | |

D) Writing an Essay/ Article

In business and engineering communication writing descriptions and manuscripts is an important task. Formal writing can be done by following certain steps; and the common stages are represented by the acronym TOWER. Each letter stands for one process;

T- **Thinking** about ideas related to the topic

O- **Organising** information by outlining, flow charts or mind mapping

W- **Writing** the first draft

E- **Editing** for re-arrangement and correction

R- **Rewriting** the final version

The pre-writing stage includes thinking, making notes and organising your ideas. The writing stage is at which all the ideas turn into sentences. Focusing on certain elements will help to make the writing more of use; i) use language appropriate for readers- understanding the level of readers will help to decide the writing style. If the readers are not related to that particular profession the writing should not include jargons (technical terms related to profession), if jargons are unavoidable, it has to be explained clearly, ii) use a reasonable sentence length- long sentences are difficult for readers to keep the ideas connected, so average sentence length can be around 20 words, iii) organising ideas in space and time- while describing events or processes, iv) Ensure coherence- coherence means logical relationship between the ideas and the presentation. A logical order has to be maintained among sentences.

The post writing stage is also known as editing stage. The first draft can be considered as rough draft. Editing is required to make the writing more refined. The article prepared by a single person can be given to someone who is well versed in the corresponding area for reviewing and if it is a group work, at the final stage, every member can sit together and discuss about the materials of each member and can compile each section to a single draft. Accuracy, completeness, logical presentation and the language can be evaluated while editing. When the article is prepared as a group work, there is a chance of difference in style and lack of coherence, so while

compiling it has to be given extra care. Word choices, spellings, grammar, punctuation and form can be checked in both contexts. If it has to be submitted, it is advisable and type and give in. The standard format is Times New Roman font and size 12 and title centre aligned. After providing samples learners were made to write articles and evaluation and feedback were also ensured. The researcher suggested practicing this format as it will be constructive while preparing a project report. An organised style of writing helps to create manuals and manuscripts.

Technical Report Writing

Learners were prepared to write different types of written records as part of the research. In the field of engineering communication, technical writing is one of the key elements of communication. It is different from expressive or descriptive writing and mostly it takes the form of reports. Technical report is a form of document where processes are described, recorded and analysed, it can also be of the different phases of a product life cycle or responses to a certain experiment or exercise. Purpose, audience and tone are the three fundamental aspects to be considered while technical report writing. The purpose and audience help to decide the tone. If it is addressed to higher officials or superiors the tone has to be requesting or recommending action and if it is to junior or subordinate, it can be directive or instructive. When the report is to present a proposal or to convince others, the tone has to be persuasive. Technical reports are very specifically aimed at achieving certain purposes and a well written report can fulfil, exactly what it is intended to do. The students were given awareness about the relevance of technical writing and asked to go through several samples to get acquainted with the style.

For a well written and well designed piece of writing, several factors have to be considered even before the process of writing begins. The objectives have to be defined very specifically at the outset itself. The writer should possess clear idea about the purpose of documentation, whether it is to simply record a process and to keep it for reference or is it a proposal or plan which needs acceptance and have to analyse whether it is desirable or undesirable. Generally technical writing is to convey information. As mentioned earlier, presentation is an important part and it can take the form of; i) points and sub-points- presenting the relevant aspects as easily accessible to the readers, ii) using tables- including tables to compare or contrast factors or for highlighting features, iii) flow charts- if a lengthy procedure has to be explained in a sequential order legibly, the easiest way is to use flow charts.

Technical writing has a very specific audience unlike other writings and it is important to identify and analyse the audience and prepare report accordingly. Learners were well explained about various situations to prepare reports. For technically literate audience, there can be prolific use of technical terms and it will help to make the document precise and compact. If the audience is non- technical, jargons and technical terms have to be minimised and when it is unavoidable, have to be well explained. When the report is meant to educate the audience on technical matters, it can take the format of a text book and if it is to issue instructions for the use of gadget, the writing can be a list of instructions or a flow chart. After giving various situations students were asked to prepare reports on each context. Another assignment was to collect different types of technical reports and arranged a discussion to make them familiar with diverse aspects. More than theoretical explanation practice of every item was ensured throughout the session.

c) **Writing Resume & CV**

The initial item that an employer comes across regarding the candidate will be a resume and it gives an overall idea about the employee. Resume is a French word means summary, popularly it is used to denote a brief account of an applicant's details to secure a job and known as professional horoscope. It is a document which contains summary of the personal details, relevant job experience, educational background, skills, goals and interests of an applicant. Every job seeker has to prepare a resume or CV while applying for an occupation. The presentation mode of resume gets changed from time to time and one has to update and prepare a relevant job profile. The general trend is to prepare a resume and taking multiple copies of it and submitting the same along with every application irrespective of the employment requisites. This tendency has to be changed, based on the type of the job; the resume has to be designed. Different profession demands diverse job skills and the applicant may have qualified a variety of courses. Based on the requisite, the candidate can highlight the relevant qualification. Considering this aspect it is very important to prepare resume clearly in a well defined manner. By referring several models and by interacting with seniors, fresh applicant can get familiarised with recent trends.

CV is an abbreviation of 'curriculum vitae', which is a written record of the candidate's education and experience while applying for a job. Superficially, CV and resume appear to be similar and comparable but there are certain basic differences in purpose, layout and approach. CV is a traditional method of presenting data, while resume evolved much later. A resume is used for business employments, HR fields and private sector jobs, whereas a CV is used while applying for academic, scientific, research, university, fellowship and other educational positions. Resume is brief and concise and has a free style enumerating the candidate's relevant credentials in

reverse chronological order. A CV is a longer version providing applicant's personal, professional and educational details and information will be chronologically arranged extending up to four or five pages. Name, full address, phone number, other personal details, educational qualification, extra-curricular activities, work experience, achievements, activities and interests, references are the essential credentials in resume or CV even though the order and presentation style differ in both. While including reference, it is very important to get permission from the concerned person and the official details and contact details have to be included in the resume or CV. It is advisable to include reference of those persons who are experts in the corresponding field and they must be known to the applicant personally. All the students were asked to prepare and submit their own resume and CV after explaining the related aspects. Discussions were carried over on the submitted scripts and gave suggestions to modify.

d) **Letter writing**

Technology has developed immensely but in certain contexts we make use of written documents and it is relevant to practice corresponding formats. After practicing several written works, the next intention was to familiarise with leave application and letter to a friend. Writing leave application is an essential step while applying for leave and as it is a record the format and style have to be clear and in proper manner. In formal situations, leave applications are submitted either by hand or by mail. The researcher could witness several letters with conspicuous spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Instead of 'grant me leave' many write 'grand me leave' and for 'yours' write 'your's' like this, several mistakes could be seen regularly.

Letter writing includes both formal and informal letters and is required in various situations. Leave applications and covering letter for job application are the most common and frequently used types of formal letters. Before introducing one sample for both formal and informal letter, all the letters written by the students were collected and shuffled among them to review. They were asked to do an overall evaluation of the letters and to note down comments. After that certain hints to make the letters were discussed. In formal letters it is advisable to follow the format strictly and to convey the matter precisely as possible at the same time clearly. The essential details to be included in a formal letter are; place and date, from address, to address, salutation, subject, the content, conclusion, name and signature. Usually these are left intended and when a letter is to be submitted in an office or institution, it is better to type and print it in the standard format. It is advisable to mention complete address with contact number. The initial task is to getting familiarised with the format. The content or the body part can be learnt by observing several samples.

More than informal letters, formal letters were focused in the training part. During informal situations recent trend is not to depend on letters and sharing of information is done mainly through phone calls or text messages. Though technology has developed tremendously, leave application and covering letter for job application are still mandatory. The submission format may be different but the format is at most similar to the earlier periods. Several samples of letters were distributed among learners to refer. All were given imaginary situations and asked to write a letter as the situation demands. The content part can be written in a short paragraph of four or five sentences including all the essential details. As the content part will be precise including the relevant details, the general notion is that the personality of the individual is reflected in the letter he writes. The importance of letter is not

completely diminished and it is constructive to practice the art of letter writing.

Learners were asked to submit different types of letters on various situations.

Stage VI- Conducting Online Activities

Distribution of activities

Table 3.6

| No | Item | Aim | Objective |
|----|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Audio/ video | To enhance listening skill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To analyse the script of audio/ video and to reproduce it |
| 2 | Phone in interview | To improve speaking skill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To get exposure to different types of interview |
| 3 | Comprehension passage | To develop reading skill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the text and to respond accurately |
| 4 | Description of a topic/picture | To practice writing skill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explain a situation/event |

Several classroom activities were conducted as part of the intervention of research to improve different communication skills. Limited time allotted for

classroom teaching and inadequate infrastructure were the constraints to carry out various activities. To overcome this, the convenient solution was to conduct online activities, which can be done without physical constraints and time barrier. Teacher assisted online activities and activities without monitoring of the instructor were arranged for learners. Students were familiar with social networking sites and all had the habit of searching Google for gathering information and clarifying doubts. Even those who could not afford a laptop or personal system were using internet on mobile phones. They also made use of college internet lab and internet browsing centres. There was not even a single student without e-mail address.

Popularity of mobile applications like whatsapp and hike also raised the number of internet users. Students are frequently using social networking sites and chat groups in whatsapp and messenger. They used to share question papers and assignments through whatsapp groups and they acknowledged it is very easy and convenient to share text, audio and video message instantly. During vacation or holidays or when they are absent, notes or doubts are shared and clarified through such groups. In some institutions even teachers form online groups with students. Most of the institutions have their own whatsapp groups including all the staff members and they confirmed it as very useful to share information instantly. At this juncture it was planned to explore the possibilities of online forums in communication skill training. Two online platforms were created for training purpose, communication.moodlecloud.com and communication869.wordpress.com. These two websites offered immense opportunities to conduct different activities and training sessions.

All the staff members who were interested to improve communication skills apart from those who handled Communication classes were given awareness about

the learning websites and its possibilities. They were motivated to create one such website and upload their subject content in it. They were also suggested to form a group including other staff members from the same institution or other colleges who handle the same subject to discuss academic perspectives. Uploading notes regarding each topic and previous or model question papers also will be beneficial for the learners. Instructors can model on official sites of KTU or IIT and other prominent institutions for guidelines. Materials based on the syllabus will help the students for exam preparation and reference. As these websites provide clear guidelines for how to create and manage contents, even the learner with basic computer knowledge can manage the sites easily.

The online activities were organised in a manner to focus on all the four communication skills. During classroom interactions several activities were conducted to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Online activities were mainly uploaded in the form of assignments. Audio and video bits were assigned to analyse the listening skill of the learners as only by active listening they will be able to explain the main ideas of what they heard. In most of the interviews especially for jobs abroad, phone in interview may be one of the selection criteria. To have an exposure, the researcher conducted mock phone in interviews and different subject experts assisted the session to ask over subject related questions. Comprehension passages are the usual assignment from school level onwards. Similar to that, passages on various topics with social relevance and questions from the given essays were uploaded to enhance reading skill. After reading the passage thoroughly they had to give appropriate answers. Related to extempore students were given topics to describe and along with it some pictures were shown to explain. In this manner, all the communication skills were practiced and analysed in online activities.

a) Moodle activities

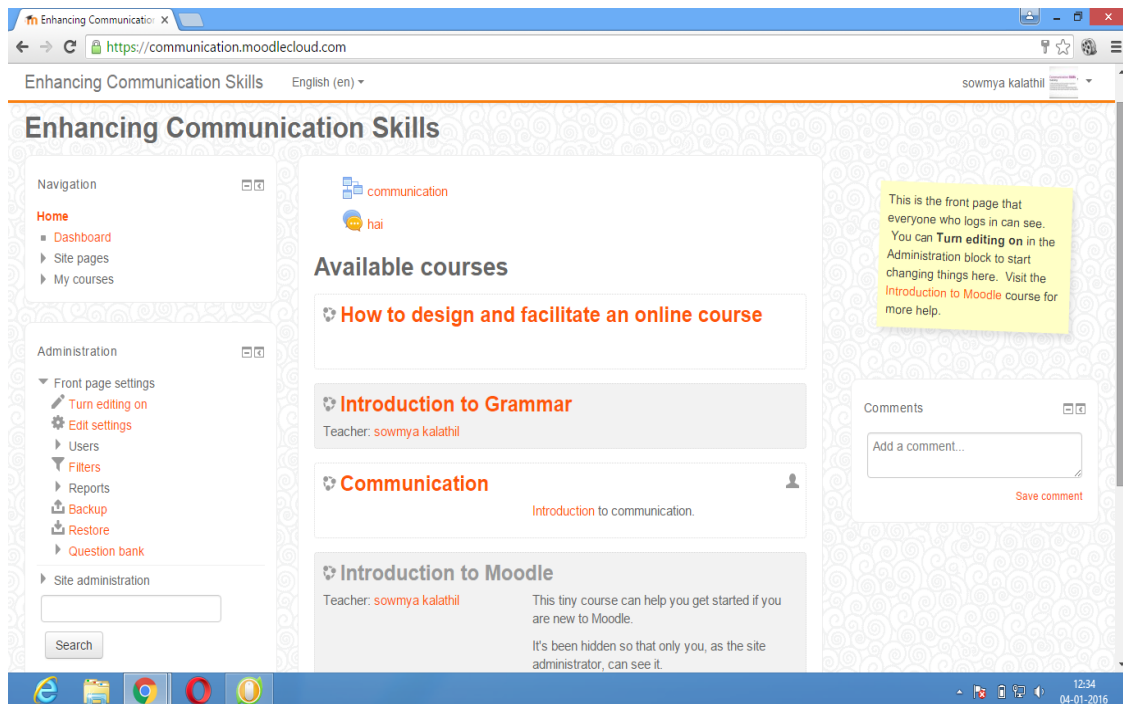


Fig. 3.8

Activities to enhance communication skills were divided and conducted in both online and offline to manage the teaching hours. Group activities like debate and group discussion were mainly conducted in classroom and written assignments were carried out in online session. A website named Communication. moodlecloud.com was created to teach and interact with students through online. A general introduction about online courses; “How to Design and Facilitate Online Course” was included as the first module. It was incorporated with the intention to get a formal introduction to online learning so that students will be familiar with a new learning pattern. A lesson regarding “Introduction to Moodle” was also added and this helped to have a beginning about Moodle and how to manage online courses. The course was useful and effective for both instructors and learners. Even students could start their own

Moodle site and manage different lessons among classmates when the situation demands.

Selected fifty students were added as users and they were enrolled to each course one by one. The researcher was the administrator of the site and by enrolling students it was possible to monitor learner's activities individually. Each student had their own account and they could sign-in and go through the contents whenever they are free. Different modules regarding communication skills were added to the website; 'Introduction to Communication skills', 'Presentation Skill', 'Comprehension Passages', and 'Basics of Grammar and Usages' were some of the items. At the end of each module either objective or descriptive type of assignments were given and responses were duly evaluated and graded. Comments for correction and suggestions for further improvement were included in the grading section.

In each section, a comment box was included to express opinions or suggestions. To interact among each other and with the instructor a chat room named "hai" was created. Through this forum, learners could interact and share their ideas. As the website was greatly user friendly, it was comfortable to handle activities. After each session, an assignment was given and it could be uploaded directly or typed in a word file. Announcements regarding the course and activity were regularly given by group messaging or through e-mail. The fifty students enrolled were from different colleges and different branches. This provided exposure to interact and understand the atmosphere of other institutions. Learners were assigned course contents both individually and group wise. The group members were shuffled once in a while and a group leader was assigned to monitor the progress of the session.

Quiz and descriptive assignments were arranged at the end of each topic. Pictures were given to explain as per their imagination and dialogues with certain blanks to fill suitably were some of the questions. There was an option to set password for assignments and also could set particular time to attempt the question. Thus the student could open the task only with the password and that too during the assigned time only. Number of attempts also could be restricted if necessary. Through the reminder or calendar settings the learners were alarmed about future projects. Options like these offered more accuracy and objectivity for the test. If anyone does malpractice, the administrator could deactivate the particular account. The contents and all activities could be taken back up for future use.

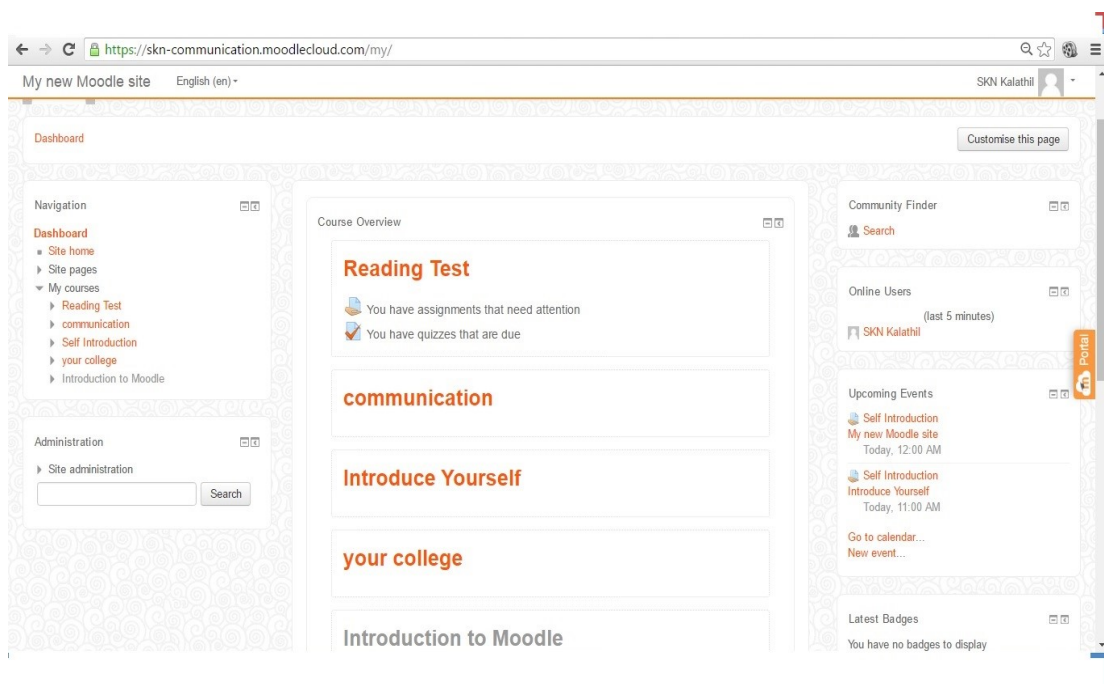


Fig. 3.9

In the descriptive session some basic questions like self introduction and to introduce their college were given. During classroom interaction, already they had attempted these questions and repetition in online session was to verify how their attempt and to assess the improvement. Regarding content most of the students

confirmed improvement and made correction on errors committed during face to face session. A number of students had doubts regarding file uploading but with personal assistance it was rectified easily. Students were very much interested as online learning is an innovative experience to them. After the initial stage students were clustered and each group had a leader. The group leader at times took the role of a teacher. Apart from learning, group members were given current issues for discussion. This activity made the session more active. All started collecting information and updated knowledge regarding present issues. Word games, puzzles, linguistic items like idioms and proverbs were also added in between the lessons.

Students were motivated to create groups in social networking sites to share information. They were suggested to take account of people with similar interests in that group. Students were asked to use formal English even in social networking sites and to avoid short forms and slangs. Majority of students admitted that most of the time they even forget spellings of simple words and are depending on dictionary and prediction while typing. While writing by hand most of them were not confident about spellings or grammar and even in a short paragraph they committed several mistakes. They were encouraged to practice writing on any topic at least ten or fifteen minutes daily. Learners were also suggested to write diary everyday as it will familiarise to record incidents. Regular interaction in the target language for a period of time will improve their linguistic skills.

Other than Moodle, students were enrolled in websites like NPTEL to learn various courses. Faculties were requested to share notes through online and they acknowledged that it saved a lot of time and it was easy to handle soft copy of notes. Apart from Communication faculties some other instructors also showed interest to create Moodle sites especially those who had less teaching hours for classroom

teaching. Colleges which had poor infrastructure and difficulty to afford smart classrooms found online teaching effective. With Moodle teachers could easily share images, video, or any type of technology based study materials. Including other subjects made the students more familiar with the website and they learned quickly to handle the site activities.

Using websites



Fig. 3.10

A website titled “communication869.wordpress.com” was created to publish communication skills developing modules. The contents were mainly prepared in the form of power point presentation and the major points were highlighted to make it more attractive. A general introduction about communication skills and topics like presentation skill, interview skill, writing CV and resume were included as modules. The website was like advertising one’s products. The posts could be shared in Twitter, facebook and other social networking sites as it will draw attention of more users. Learners could view the contents of wordpress site by logging to the website. It was like similar to any other website in use and there were no complicated or confusing aspects. The website has many elements to make it appear more attractive to the audience. The uploaded contents could be edited and modified after getting reviews and feedback. The administrator could get the status of viewership and messages from

audience. The website provides detailed user guide and instructions to manage the site. Apart from creating contents one can download or share links from other websites to the personal wordpress site. The modules can be in text, power point, audio or video format. There is no limit for the number of viewers and any number of users can watch the contents if they know the website address. The web address was shared through social networking sites and asked the learners to share among their peer groups. The objectives were to publish announcements regarding the course and make the learners aware about the possibilities of the site. Students who had interest in co-curricular activities or in entrepreneurship showed interest to use the site for future ventures. Faculties were also enthusiastic to exploit the platform to advertise their profile.

Evaluation is an indispensable part in learning process which gives feedback for the completed action. Classroom activities are usually monitored or done as per the instructions of the faculty and this directions help to conduct the correction part efficiently. The consciousness that the performances are being evaluated made the students to do their part seriously. Online activities are of two types, activities administered by the instructor and without the monitoring of the instructor. As the students were familiar with social networking sites, learning through these websites was not scrutinised by the instructor. Initially tips were given to take advantage of the possibilities of social networking sites for language learning. Facebook groups on various topics and links to quiz programmes help in learning process. All were suggested to download a good dictionary with phonetics in mobile phones. Mobile dictionaries are very useful to refer meanings instantly and it is advantageous to clarify meanings wherever and whenever the learner needs. Learners were recommended to join online interactive forums on various topics as per their interest.

The online forums will have members from all over the world and active groups will regularly update the content. Thus the viewers can get wide perspectives on different areas immediately.

Teaching communication skills was done through both online and offline, the next stage was giving evaluation test. Different activities for speaking, listening, reading and writing were assigned. Students showed remarkable improvement in communication skills and they had a strong inclination to improve linguistic ability. Faculties were suggested to continue activities because once they are discontinuing classroom or online activities gradually they may lose interest. The most important element was to make the students to continue the practiced activities regularly and faculties discussed about this aspect with students. Conducting mock interviews was another way to make them conscious of the significance of communication skills.

Learners were unaware or neglecting the learning possibilities of social media and they were more interested in chatting and updating status of their accounts. Instant sharing of messages, voice call and video call offer great possibility for learning. But most of the students were avoiding this opportunity and what they did generally was creating a group of friends or college mates and sharing information and commenting on that. For improving linguistic skills students were asked to read online articles regularly as once they are familiar with reading, in the next stage will be able to write comments or reviews for the materials. Those who are introvert or not confident can create a peer group and can upload the writings in the group so that other members can give suggestions and feedback. Practicing this regularly for a time period will improve confidence to write in blog or twitter. The effective way to improve communication skills is to practice regularly and social networking sites offer excellent platforms to showcase linguistic abilities.

Stage VII- Facilitating the concerned faculty to reinforce the activities

The objective of visiting students and arranging interactive session in the classroom was to make them realise the relevance of improving communication skills and to introduce various methods to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Before conducting activities in classroom the researcher had detailed discussions with the corresponding faculty in each institution. It helped to have understanding of the learning style and communication level of the learners. Factors like academic excellence of students, whether the faculty is subject expert or from some other streams, infrastructure and allotted teaching hours influenced the learning pattern. In several institutions especially in self financing colleges infrastructure was comparatively better and most of the colleges have set up language labs but the academic excellence of students was relatively not good as in government or aided colleges. These features influenced each other in case of language training.

Improving communication skills demand factors like good physical atmosphere, trained faculty and most importantly genuine effort from learners. The institutions which had trained English faculty allotted specific hours for communication and language labs were also functioning effectively. In some colleges other subject teachers were handling these hours and they did not have an opportunity to attend training programmes to teach English language and they taught as per their convenience and experience. While installing language laboratory the respective company will give training to run the system and may provide a manual regarding how to assign programmes in the class. This session is the only guideline for faculties and they find it difficult to train different communication skills as language is a dissimilar subject from science and it cannot be taught like other engineering subjects.

One of the significant aspects of the present research is to motivate the faculties in the visited institutions to organise various activities to enhance linguistic skills. Throughout the institution visit, the researcher had interaction with the faculty and welcomed them to be a part of classroom activities. Active support from them helped to conduct the performances more easily and as students are already familiar with the faculty they could adapt the new system quickly. The concerned teacher was introduced to different online platforms and they were requested to experience some of the online forums. Interaction with different faculties paved way to have innovative ideas and modify the planned methods. Each of them played an indispensable role in the training programme. Enthusiasm and positive response from the students motivated them to continue with more activities in communication classes.

Final Test

Pre test and post test were the two important elements in the research. Pre test was conducted before implementing the blended method and post test carried out after the teaching programme. The four communication skills were concentrated in the study and the same were tested and analysed in both pre test and post test. A two hours test was arranged for students and was conducted through Moodle website. Question paper was prepared in four sections in such a manner to test listening, speaking, reading and writing. Total mark allotted was out of 20 and each section carried 5 marks. To check listening skill an audio of 3 minutes was uploaded and it was a speech on global warming. Students had to listen the speech and upload a summary of what they understood. For speaking skill learners were called over telephone and had to speak on a given topic for three minutes. To evaluate reading skill a passage on the importance of wearing seat belt was added and readers have to attempt ten multiple choice questions and one descriptive type question based on the

passage. To analyse writing skill, an image was uploaded and asked to describe it in around 150 words.



Fig. 3.11

All the fifty students of the experimental group participated in the final test. The exam was open to attend only during a fixed time and they had to finish it within the allotted time. Students were given a single chance to write the exam and editing was not possible once they upload the answers. Grading method was followed during the evaluation and along with grade comments for each response were given. The errors committed and how the answer could have been improved was noted in the comment box. Some responses were remarkable and the researcher enormously appreciated it. A badge with the logo of Moodle was designed to award for the high scoring learners. 90% of the students showed improvement in their communication

skills. Regular practice in both face to face interaction and online learning had made a tremendous change in their linguistic skills.

The study materials were downloadable for learners and they find it useful for reference. As per their request notes on several topics were uploaded after the exam also. The grading system was very convenient and all the responses of candidates were evaluated on the same day itself. Using the option 'notify student' the researcher could immediately inform the candidate about the result. Along with four communication skills, the current method of incorporating online and direct teaching and its impact was also analysed during the test. Majority of the students responded that blended method is more effective and motivating than the traditional teaching and learning style. Convenience in study time and immense opportunity for interaction are the remarkable and attractive elements in the recent method.

Digital Literature

In the present study, digital literature was introduced to learners as a modern trend. Blended learning makes use of the possibilities of technology and incorporate latest aspects in teaching and learning. The new generation look into the digital world and the upcoming trends enthusiastically. Digital literature or e-literature is works that make use of the capabilities and contexts provided by the single or networked computer. Some among the broad e-lit category are; hypertext fiction and poetry (on and off the web), literature presented using Flash or other platforms, computer art installation, conversational characters also known as chatter boxes, literary apps, novels that take the form of e-mail, sms or blog, poems and stories that are generated by computers. Many collaborative writing projects allow readers to contribute to the text which may develop new ways of writing. The field of digital literature is an

evolving one and nowadays literature is not only migrating from print to electronic media but increasingly 'born digital' works are being created enormously. The basic difference between e-books, digitalised version of printed material and e-literature is that, the first one written and upgraded to digital format whereas e-lit is born digitally. The latter often include conceptual sound art but reading and writing remain the central objective.

Electronic literature do not include print literature in digitalised form and incorporate work of art which is created on a computer and meant to be read on a computer. In brief e-lit is to promote writing, publishing and reading in an electronic media. The varieties of digital literature are splendidly diverse and associated to print literature to some networked communities. Story space was one of the first hypertext authoring programme created by Michael Joyce, Jay David Bolter, and John B. Smith and then licensed to Mark Bernstein who has improved and maintained it. Earlier it worked for CDs or disks Macintosh or PC platforms. It was the major programme choice for digital writers of 1980s and 1990s (Hayles, 2007). With the advent of World Wide Web new authoring programmes were made available for writers. Options for graphics, colour and sound were more advanced in web.

In the 1990s e-mail novels were popular which were spread through mails. Later we could see literature dependent on mobile technologies which ranged from short fiction delivered serially over phones to geographical location narratives based on GPS technologies. Some stories were mixed with games or vice versa and the receiver could enjoy both game and fiction. Along with novel and stories drama was also set in digital format. In the twentieth century there was an explosion in interest of readers towards books and in the twenty first century digital literature came to field. To create more effect some writers associated with graphic designers and painters

while creating their work. Such kind of upshot provides three dimensional experiences for readers.

Creative Commons, Archiving the Avant Garde, Archive IT.org and the Library of Congress are some organisations which circulate and preserve e-literature. While taking membership in such associations one has to consider common areas of interest. Affiliation with many organisations will help to have extensive network of people who involve in producing works and audience who read, discuss and teaches e-lit. Collection and circulation of literary works among each other will help to develop serious discussions about works of art which exists at present and to develop and create further in the field. Discussion about printed books and gathering many audiences to interact is a difficult task to arrange. To overcome issues like this, online forums and above mentioned organisations have helped. The modern literary world was introduced for the learners and asked them to be familiar and make use of the possibilities.

In classroom, a discussion was conducted about famous blog writers like Obama, Narendra Modi, Sasi Tharoor and many other political figures, celebrities from media and renowned public figures. Blog is well known and commonly used digital platform. In the introductory level before thinking about or start writing digital literature one can opt for blogging and it gives wide opportunity of discussion. Because of publication issues many young writers start writing blogs which is very convenient and less expensive. Comments and feedback from the followers help to improve the writing. Political leaders publish their plans and updates views through blogs. The written materials can be readily shared without much effort and readers can access it instantly. This is a great advantage in digital literature as immediate response is an inspirational factor. Students were motivated to note down and publish

their writing in a networked community or through any social media as it helps to improve reading and writing habit to a great extent.

E-Books and E-Readers

Online learning was the component of Blended method and other pioneering technology based movements were also familiarised for learners as part of the research. Reading is an inevitable part in learning and E-books or e-readers help to carry a wide variety of books wherever we go. Book available in electronic format is called e-book and it can be downloaded to any computer like PC, Mac or laptop. Generally e-books have numbered pages, table of contents, pictures and graphics exactly like printed books. Internet facility helps to purchase and download e-books. After making the payment the customer will be directed towards the link to download book and in this way one can avail materials from any part of the world. E-books are available in PDF, EXE-compiled HTML pages and PDA format. As electronic books are becoming popular mobile phone applications and e-book reader devices are available in market. Gadgets which are used only to read e-books are known as e-readers and it is available in various format, size, storage capacity and specificity. The Kindle from Amazon and the Nook from Barnes and Noble are the most popular e-readers. The screen size of e-reader is of 5 inches to 9 inches diagonally. Storage space varies in different e-readers and in addition to internal memory some companies offer additional storage capacity through memory card. Earlier e-readers needed connection to computer to download books but recent devices can access books in the e-reader itself. Some offer additional facility of music, games and personalisation. Read out function is also available in a few models.

Technology offers tremendous opportunities to improve literacy. E-books have many advantages as lots of e-books are available in lower cost or free when compared to printed books and it is more convenient to carry especially for young readers, moreover it takes only less storing space than a book shelf and above all, reader can take anywhere the huge collection of books without physical strain. Along with these advantages e-books have certain disadvantages also; it may not be able to return if the format is not compatible with the reading device and once the storage material is damaged nothing can be done, like printed versions it cannot be shared with other people and only certain books can be lent from one person to another that also for a short period of time. Still younger generation prefer e-books as it offers wireless downloads and save time for a trip to book stores. The technology of e-books and e-readers is still advancing. Several enhancements are added to make it more attractive to consumers. Companies are experimenting with display technology and they are trying to make it possible to read under any type of light. Certain textbooks are also made available in the format of e-books. In the future, the student has an e-reader and all the text books and reference materials in the format of e-books may be the trend. Tablets and ipads may also become the integral part of future generation's learning and reading.

Paper books cannot be completely replaced, though e-books have several advantages. The feel and emotional satisfaction get from printed version will still exist and it cannot be fully abolished. Technical failure is a great threat regarding e-books or e-reading and this kind of errors do not subsist with printed books. Present society is fast paced and more attractive towards instant gratification. Instant downloading and ease of handling e-books make them choose latest technology based reading. Though technology fails in certain aspects on the other hand it advances

always. Technology is progressing and once we reach the goal only we can conclude what are the effects produced. E-books can be electronic version of printed book or written as e-version itself. The first mentioned category is produced from pre-existing hard copy generally by document scanning or with the use of robotic book scanners or by re-entering the text with the keyboard. Commercially published and sold e-books exist without printed version and they are intended to read in e-readers or any such devices like computer, tablet and smart phones. In the US nowadays more books are publishing in online than printed versions which have to be distributed through book shops. Price, comfort to handle and effortless buying procedure attract more people to e-books. Slowly this trend is getting popularised in India and other third world countries.

The most common explanation for poor reading habit is lack of time to go to library or to purchase books. The younger generation like to spend time with gadgets than spending time with book or with fellow beings. The researcher informed the learners about mobile applications like Kobo books, Cool reader, Aldiko, Tom's guide, Talk Android and computer applications like MOBI, EPUB, Kobo desktop reading, Kindle, Google books, Magic Scroll which all help to access and read e-books. Not only fiction, reference books and nonfiction materials are also available in e-book format. Teachers can make use of e-books and they can attempt to write books for students. It is possible to publish an e-book, chapter by chapter as each chapter is written. Technology is changing everyday and it is important to update knowledge regarding latest trends. In a printed version it is a tedious task to change and publish again. As an attempt several writers publish printed version as well as e-books. Instructors can try to write e-books related to their topics and update it regularly. Students can write and publish articles in electronic format which may inculcate their

research aptitude and investigating nature. Printed books cannot be avoided completely but as engineering is a field related to latest technology and application it is advisable to experiment recent trends. With this intention learners were motivated to attempt e-books and e-readers.

Inculcating interest to language learning and improving communication skills was the primary mission of the research. Teaching fundamental aspects of language for tertiary level students was a difficult task and by considering the practical difficulties, the sample size was limited. In engineering colleges the number of students in one class may be above 50 and analysing communication skills of each student individually will be a tedious task for the instructor. Considering this aspect, focus was on the development of linguistic skills and suggested multiple ways for self study. More than individual activities, group activities were conducted in classrooms to include more students simultaneously as group activities will give more confidence for learners to interact as they may have feeling of togetherness. Along with this, individual activities like presentations and extempore were also conducted. Individual activities were mostly scheduled in online programmes, where time is not a constraint.

Online teaching and face to face interaction were intended to enhance all the communication skills of learners. In the introductory level activities like group discussion, debate, extempore, written assignments were conducted in classroom. This helped to have an exposure during online interaction and communication was at ease. Among linguistic skills, speaking skill based activities were programmed for classroom session and text based assignments, giving notes and written projects considered mostly for online programmes. Thus there was a balance between online and offline activities. After classroom interaction all the activities were continued in online course.

Including online and classroom activities together was more beneficiary for regular and thorough practice. Written assignments were given both online and offline. Faculties who handled Communication hours were motivated to conduct activities and to ensure student participation. The four linguistic skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing were trained by incorporating both online and classroom methods. Activities were organised in such a manner to maintain balance between online and offline activities. Merits and demerits of online and offline teaching methods were identified and discussed with the learners. Students were asked to analyse and explore the possibilities of both the methods.

Need for self study was emphasised in the research as the classroom time limits the learning opportunity. In individual learning also learner can follow blended method; can depend on websites for referring study material and can have direct discussion with peer groups or experts to get more clarity on the topic.

Communication is a skill and it can be improved by practice, blended method offers further opportunity and exposure to practice different linguistic skills. Limitations of online learning such as loneliness and lack of motivation can be avoided in classroom learning. In the same way demerits of classroom teaching like time limit, lack of individual attention and physical barriers can be rectified in online learning. Thus by blending both the methods, most of the limitations of learning may be reduced.

Concept of collaborative learning or peer group learning is also promoted in the study. Communication is essentially to convey ideas and regular interaction with others will help to improve language abilities. Exploiting online and offline measures offers ample opportunities to enhance communication skills.