

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR FUTURE ENGINEERS

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Nowadays due to modern communication technologies, the increasing speed and reduced costs of international transport, migration flows and the internationalization of business an increasing number of engineers is engaged in intercultural communication when dealing with foreign professionals or working in a foreign nation.

Intercultural communication is the verbal and nonverbal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds.

The aim of intercultural communication is to allow positive and productive interaction. Intercultural communication is also not simply language proficiency. It is known that communication requires the ability to understand a language. However much of the communication is nonverbal: our body language, our attitudes, hand-shaking etc. Some researchers estimate that up to 93% of all human communication is nonverbal, although according to recent studies, it's actually closer to 60%.

Intercultural communication also requires an understanding that different cultures have different customs, standards, social mores, and even thought patterns.

Intercultural communication skills are those required to communicate, or share information, with people from other cultures and social groups. Good intercultural communication skills require a willingness to accept differences and adapt to them.

Foreign language skills are an important part of intercultural communication skills.

Communication skills as well as foreign language skills are an essential component in the education of engineering students to facilitate not just students' education but also to prepare them for their future careers. Such skills are especially essential for an engineer who seeks to carry out his/her professional practice in the

global arena. Multi-lingual skills are considered to be a significant element in the make-up of the new global engineer. Moreover communication skills are regarded as a valuable career enhancer [3].

There is no doubt that in the era of globalization, international projects are increasing, and cross-cultural communication and collaboration is rising and engineering is not an exception. English is accepted as the most widespread language in the world [4]. The number of people who speak English with at least some degree of proficiency exceeds any other language [5]. This is important for engineering students and must motivate them study English as this indicates that English may be more useful internationally than almost any other language due to its spread.

Jensen affirms that employers want a number of new competencies, with an emphasis on an increased ability to communicate and good foreign language skills [1].

Engineers should have not only good command of mathematics, mechanics and technology, but the modern engineer must also be able to communicate effectively using English. This is especially important given that engineering projects are now planned and implemented across national and cultural borders.

A course in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) will enhance English language training and an engineering student's communication skills. It will also aid in the globalization of education and the internationalization of future engineers. The concept of ESP achieves more in the education of engineering students by focusing the learner's attention on the particular terminology and communication skills required in the professional field. It is possible to find different examples in the engineering field, including computer science, electrical engineering, aviation's airspeak and the railway's railspeak.

Oral communication skills are considered very important in the graduates' new work environments. Knowledge and technical know-how are clearly important, but these must be presented with an excellent standard of communication skills, particularly oral. Indeed, oral communication and presentation skills are considered

one of the best career enhancers and to be the single biggest factor in determining a student's career success or failure [3].

Communication skills development has been demonstrated through the use of various methods, such as class discussions and presentations, peer review, role-play etc [2].

Communication involves receiving as well as sending signals. As such, listening skills are just as important and verbal and written communication skills competences. It has been asserted that we spend 70% of our time awake in some mode of communication, which is comprised of the following proportions:

- 10% writing;
- 15% reading;
- 30% talking;
- 45% listening [6].

Kline further states that listening is crucial in the workplace [6]. As such, it is vital across the professions, including engineering. Listening entails the reception and correct understanding of verbal communication and without effective listening skills the verbal message can be distorted or ignored, thereby causing the communication process to fail. So, listening skills exercises must be integrated into the study environment of future engineers.

Written communication skills involve a more active, rather than passive, learning method. Writing can enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as serve to identify and confront personal misconceptions [7]. In this case, students need help in organising and structuring reports and arguments.

Ineffective and poor written communication in engineering workplaces may lead to misinterpretation, inefficiency and time wastage, thereby adversely affecting problem resolution. Such miscommunication may contribute to mistrust and aggression, as well as appear unprofessional and be unproductive [2]. This indicates that poor communicators will have trouble in the workplace, potentially contributing to problems rather than solving them.

Written communication needs to be relevant and properly implemented. It should also generate feedback and provide accurate assessment, as well as make a positive and permanent impact on student learning.

Examples of written communication include: engineering reports, technical writing, essays, reflective journals, peer review, and student conference papers.

In conclusion it should be said that language and communication skills are recognized as important elements in the education of the modern engineer.

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