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**Enhancing Communication Skills Using *Wordsworth Language Lab Software* among
Engineering Students of Gujarat State**

Yogesh Ramani

Marwadi Education Foundation Rajkot (Gujarat)



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Abstract

This 21st century – an era of information and technology demands that engineering students should have language competency if they want to reach the global pool of knowledge and technology. The chief objective of Communication Skills at Technical Education is to achieve the level of communicative competence that authorizes students to use a foreign language in professional activities. Many academicians and researchers have proposed different methodologies to learn English using existing technologies i.e. educational software, CDs, DVDs, videos, emails, internet, language labs, etc. This paper discusses how web-based language learning software can be used effectively in technical education to enhance communicative competency. Implementation of web-based language learning software in academic is complex and long-term process, but it provides a better learning experience and a competitive education. English teachers have privilege of using software for supplementing class with interactive tasks, audio-visual materials to arouse and sustain the interest of students, motivate the unwilling students to explore the mode of learning through multi-media. With the popularization of ICT, now people have the opportunity to learn from and learnt with technology. This paper presents overview of availability of language learning software and its effectiveness.

Keywords: Communication Skills, English Language Learning Software, Use of ICT



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Author's Note:

Mr. Yogesh Ramani has been teaching Communication Skills and Proficiency in English since 2010. He earned M.A. (ELT) from H.M. Patel Institute of English Training and Research, Vallabh Vidya Nagar, Anand and M.Phil. from Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalay Gandhinagar. He also successfully completed Certificate in Teaching of English (C.T.E.) from IGNOU and B.Ed. (English) from Saurashtra University Rajkot. He is pursuing Ph.D. from Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan. His area of research includes Spoken English, Designing Worksheet on Basic Grammar and Functional English, Designing an E-learning Course and Test, Communication skills, Use of Digital English Language Lab and ICT in ELT.



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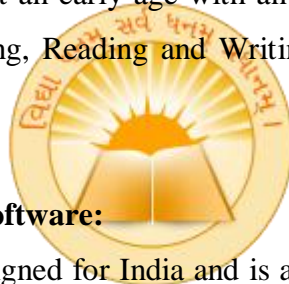
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Enhancing Communication Skills Using *Wordsworth Language Lab Software* among Engineering Students of Gujarat State

Introduction:

The 21st century educational institute provides a platform of knowledge and great motivation to build up a healthy foundation of requisite skills in a student. Skills developed at an early age are retained forever. India is the second largest nation in the world where English is spoken as the second or third language formed by just 10.66% of the total population of 1.16 billion. Skills are developed through proper training and retained forever. It is a need of an hour to enhance the level of proficiency of English to expand the ability and potentiality. Researchers and educators agree that Indian engineering graduates are not proficient in English (Tickoo, 2004). Technical graduates are suitable for employment in the outsourcing industry because of their mastery of language skills i.e. speaking and writing well in English. To increase the proficiency level students must have given appropriate English language training. The recommendation is that English Skill development programmes are necessary at an early age with an emphasis on the functional use of English covering all aspects of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) and remedy regional language influences.



Words Worth English Language Lab Software:

Words Worth English language lab is designed for India and is a highly researched initiative of the ACTUniv Group, an ISO 9001: 2008 company certified enterprise and a trusted education company with two decades of service in technology education and training. It's expertise in technology, multimedia and content development has been instrumental in presenting a world class language lab solution for the academia in India. Words Worth, the Digital English Language Lab (DELL) from ACTUniv, has the most comprehensive interactive digital content. It uses the blended learning methodology with digital content for both the trainer as well as the student, enhancing learning, practice and self assessment, judiciously using the best elements of technology and training pedagogy. Words Worth English language lab uses the institution's existing computer laboratory PC's and classroom resources to create the International class English language lab. Each implementation is meticulously executed providing the college with product know-how and training of trainers followed by proactive support.



Salient Features of Words Worth English Language Lab

1. **Designed for India:**

The entire programme has been designed keeping the requirements of Indians in mind. From topics to the basic look and feel, the entire learning environment is designed for the Indian audience.

2. **Highly Interactive:**

The Words Worth ELT programme provides a rich interactive experience that incorporates many audio-visual elements. For example in speech sounds, the student has several practice activities where he can practice words by listening to the correct pronunciation, recording his voice and comparing his recording with correct pronunciation.

3. **Self Paced Learning:**

The programme allows the student to take control of his own learning. The software allows the student to work at his own pace. Every topic includes a short assessment activity that gives instant feedback to the student.



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4. Self-Assessment:

Several self-evaluation tools power programme. The feature of Listen-record-compare provides a unique opportunity to learners for self-evaluation. Using head phones and the Words Worth software on a PC, they can perfect their pronunciation by practicing interesting pronunciation exercises. Additionally it includes a performance report engine that allows each student to track his or her own progress through the course and generate dynamic personalized performance reports as needed. Teachers can also use performance reports to monitor the progress of their class.

5. Modular Structure:

The structure of the programmes comprises of 3 progressive levels, PREP I (Beginner), PREP II (Intermediate) and PREP III (Advance), specially designed for the academic system followed by colleges and institutions of vocational and higher learning

The Words Worth system and pedagogy

Words Worth takes care of the finest nuance of the English language, improving all aspects such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, free speech, intonation and modulation besides offering remedy to correct regional influences of the mother tongue. The content has rich audiovisual features offering ample practice and self assessment such as 'listen-record-compare' and glossary. The programme allows student to take control of his own pace of learning. Hence students get ample practice to resolve weaknesses and sharpen abilities at the same time providing privacy during practice with no embarrassment of making mistakes. The blended teaching methodology achieves better results in shorter duration and is ideally suited for the India environment.

1. Vocabulary building:

Words Worth ELT software content includes a vocabulary of over about 3,500 items that covers a majority of the words used in general communication. Words are introduced in increasing complexity, by way of semantic grouping and highly contextualized to the Indian context with neutral accent that Indian learners can relate to and identify with. A word is introduced in it's near to natural language context where the learner grasps the meaning of the word by the context itself and does not have to refer to the dictionary time and again. Words are dealt in such a way, that they get into the learners' passive repertoire gradually forming a part of active repertoire by way of their



using those words in the class room in form of free speech, role play and various other interactive activities. The focus here is on pronunciation and developing comfort with these standard words, not traditional vocabulary building and understand word usage in sentences. It's not only the semantic or segmental aspect of vocabulary that are looked at but also the supra - segmental features such as stress and intonation of the word are taken care of.

2. Neutral Pronunciation:

Pronunciation plays a major role in effective communication and therefore a great amount of emphasis is given to

- Correct pronunciation of consonant sounds and vowel sounds
- Syllable and Syllable Stress
- Intonation and Modulation
- Reduce mother tongue influence in speech

The meaning, pronunciation and the use of the vocabulary item takes place simultaneously. In the initial stages learners first listen to the word used by an expert in the given context. After having listened to the word with its correct pronunciation governed by the correct stress pattern, the learner practices the word by comparing it with the expert's voice. Once he has grasped the meaning and the right pronunciation of the word the learner puts it to use. Irrespective of the teacher's accent the learners acquire the correct accent as the practice is based on the expert's neutral accent which is devoid of various regional influences.

3. Word stress:

Producing correct consonant and vowel sounds do not guarantee the perfect pronunciations. In English the pronunciation pattern rests on the stress pattern which is based on the syllable pattern.

- In the Words Worth English language development programme, there is a great emphasis laid on syllable stress, word stress, intonation and modulation giving rhythm to the language.
- There are about 3000 words practiced with the correct stress pattern giving rhythm to the language. The learners can compare their stress pattern based on the graphic representation appearing on the computer screen by comparing it with that of the expert's.



4. Grammar:

The focus of teaching grammar is on using correct grammar, to build functional grammar in the areas of Articles, Adjectives, Prepositions and Tenses and to overcome Indianism in speech. Words Worth helps to develop grammar by not teaching grammar overtly. Learners are exposed to various natural language situations where in various grammatical segments come into play. And, in the process they form or invent grammar rules on their own while listening, doing exercises and participating in various activities. In the cases where learners fail to make the correct use the teacher supplies the expression coupled with the relevant rules and facilitates the communication. In the initial stage, grammar is explored tacitly through using various grammatical segments in several real life language situations. It's while participating in those situations that learners assimilate and grasp various grammar rules and patterns make use of grammar and from their own understanding about the grammar. In later levels grammar is taught overtly but still in the functional way. It's while performing in the target language, or while analyzing other speaker's functions in the target language that the learners learn to apply rules and derive grammar through functions. Grammar thus is handled through real life scenario supplying rules in form of tools to be used for making communication effective. In the conventional grammar class the grammar lesson begins with talking about the grammar rules where in the learners end up learners remember rules well but when it come to applying them, they fail utterly. Where as in Words Worth grammar classroom the real life situations where the learners have to use those grammatical items, where as in Words Worth English session a lot of language is generated through activities debate, discussion, role plays, free speech and the grammar rules are supplied incidentally or the way they are shared in the real life situations. At the end of each grammar lesson there are three real life scenarios containing several grammatical lapses. The learners have to identify those lapses and correct them by using rules packaged with those scenarios.

5. Intonation & Modulation:

As in the case of other segments, intonation and modulations too are packaged along with the contextualized texts supplied by way of listening, reading, and fluency practice. Learners listen to various language segments in the right intonation and rhythm and practice these segments by record and compare device present in the software.



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6. Forms of Communication & skills

Be aware of the importance of speaking in globally - accepted English Communication skills are nurtured right from level one by way of involving learners into listening to good English by the experts while working on the interactive activities and by applying the learning instantly in the classroom while participating in pair and group work. But the hard core soft skills or the communication skills are introduced in the later part of the programme which includes group discussions, presentations, role plays, and personal interview skills along with developing Email and telephone etiquettes.

7. Evaluation, Assessment & Feedback:

Assessments are an integral feature of the Words Worth programme. The students participate in pre and post assessments and receive feedback about their performance. The E-learning sessions, record students' voice in reading and free speech exercises to assess pronunciation, fluency, and voice modulation. Students also attempt tests, both written and verbal, for grammar. In the E-learning sessions students will do computer-based formative and summative assessments to check their understanding of concepts learnt. Since it's about evaluating learners spoken skill the evaluation parameters are different. A performance is based on clarity of pronunciation, stress pattern, intonation pattern, active vocabulary, application based grammar and usage, pace of speech and fluency, the rate of Mother tongue influence and Indianism, harsh and soft consonant sounds, perfect neutral vowel sound and meaningful reading.

8. Methodology: Blended Learning Methodology:

Words Worth English language development programme is an integrated course in spoken English that enhances the ability to speak English fluently in daily life. Learners arrive at this objective through a rigorous programme of blended learning. Words Worth is a unique blend of Instructor Led Training (ILT) and Computer-Based Training (CBT). The sessions are designed so that the course follows a parallel-structure in which concepts are introduced in the ILT session, and reinforced with practice and an innovative approach to learning in the CBT session. The idea here is to apply the learning in ways that will make sessions enjoyable and the language work easy-to-remember. Learning and studies have been with us ever since we were children, but for learners to remember and master what they have learnt, it needs to be creative and fun. This is what we have attempted to



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do in this course.

Training of Trainers: Nothing is left to chance in the Words Worth language development process. Before the Words Worth programme is implemented in the institute a three day Training of Teachers - TOT is conducted where the teachers are not only familiarized with the software but they are made well conversant with the procedure to make the programme effective and fruitful. The training ends only with the teachers demonstrating their lessons adopting Words Worth methodology accomplishing all the stages from Ice - breaker to ILT, CBT and evaluation.

Capabilities, Competence & Performance:

Teaching English Words Worth way develops confidence, competence and fluency over the period making learner a perfect professional. Basic levels cater to the learners who are not acquainted to English much, the typically vernacular medium students. This level supports learners to get equipped in deploying basic vocabulary and structures to participate in their day to day communication situations. As the programme advances, learners develop fair amount of grammatical accuracy and fluency leading to confidence building with the help of which learner begin to participate in group discussions, presentations and interviews in their real life situations.

Various role play and free speech activities make the Words Worth classroom sessions highly interactive and participatory in nature which make even the classroom sessions as interesting as language lab sessions and helps in removing fear amongst the learners and leads them to feel at par with English medium learners.

The implementation:

Words Worth English Language Lab plays an effective role in grooming the young talent when it is implemented concurrently as part of the College curriculum giving it equal emphasis, as shall be the other subjects. The recommended schedule plan shall contain one classroom session followed by one Computer based learning session per week. The classroom training will conduct by the Trainer using a multimedia computer with LCD projection system with the Words Worth Trainer Software content. The Lab sessions will have each student undergoing practice on an individual computer using a headset under the supervision of the trainer. The practice sessions will involve the student in exercises to listen, speak and self assessment at their own pace repeating exercises as many times as required.



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Conclusion:

English language and communication skills are the vital elements in the technical education. The facilitator should develop new and exciting language teaching methodology integrating innovative technologies. The interactive materials and skill based approach expose learners to authentic language and challenge to interact naturally in the language. Now English is not meant for academic only but it becomes real means of interaction and sharing among people. Learning cannot be effective if it happens among the four walls of classroom. It is a time to connect the classrooms to the world outside to realize the potential of learning and make it effective through integrating educational technologies in teaching.



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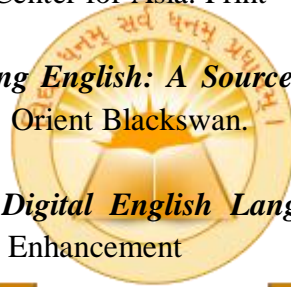
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