ℓ-ENGLISH: IS RESTRUCTURING THE CURRICULUM THE NEED OF THE HOUR?

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ABSTRACT: -

Electronic Communication has developed a new paradigm of unified networking which is influencing and swaying the entire globe today. English has played a pivotal role in this era as it has served as the medium of pursuing technical communication. In this age of digitalization and technical communication, the curriculum should cater to the needs of the demands of the new generation work culture. Hence there is a tremendous need to restructure this entire curriculum not just to equip the students with this new skill but also to make them job ready. The new curriculum would open new vistas of proficiency for the students and equip them with skill sets to face the new challenges.

Key Words:- Electronic Communication, ℓ-English, technical communication.

Electronic Communication has emerged as a vital tool for Effective Communication in the 21st century. It has made a sweeping and significant cultural change which has ultimately boosted personal productivity. No organization can survive without electronic infrastructure, embracing computer, digital data compilation etc. Every institution should extend its façade and include technological devices in their domain. The era of digital and information technology has shown its multi-dimensional aspect in the past decade itself. The cost effectivity and speed of this electronic form of communication has overshadowed the conventional means. It has broken the barriers of time, space and geographical boundaries and has enabled man to break the shackles of isolation and confinement.

English has been the language of this global electronic phenomenon. The advanced IT systems have enabled smooth transaction of information, services, product and money. This accelerated and innovated electronic communication through the medium of English language has aroused the need of developing ℓ-English teaching and training in our institutes and colleges. Though the past decade has shown an upsurge in the electronic media, our universities have hoodwinked the idea of introducing ℓ-English as a part of the university curriculum. Introducing web page content writing, e-mailing, or any such form of functional English which will be of practical use to the student should be included in the syllabus. It would equip the students of today and tomorrow with a competitive edge to face global challenges and also enhance their employability skills.

Globalization has revolutionized the entire work culture all around the globe. International interconnectedness has made communication and interaction more complex. The need for

expertise in technical communication has become mandatory. "Technical communication is a generic term for all written and oral communications done on the job- whether in business, industry or other professions. It is particularly identified with documents in technology, engineering, science, the health professions and other fields with specialized vocabularies." (1) Students should be made conversant in technical communication so as to meet the challenges of global employability. Scope and opportunities in the global employment market for technical communication experts have multiplied dramatically. Since there is a great demand for technical English masters, adequate training would suffice in meeting the expectations of the global electronic work culture.

Survival in any business or industry will now depend to a great extent on the mastery over electronic communication. Hence professionals of every field should be taught ℓ-English, so that they can cope up with the challenges of the modern electronic world. This new era of Information Technology demands excellent ability to communicate through the electronic media. This ability to use the electronic media calls for a lot of knowledge about technology. Moreover students have to learn to not just use the electronic devices, but they should be trained in ℓ-writing too. Thus modern day communication has multi-dimensional aspect. The speed, cost effectivity and bulk of this communication has made people choose it over the conventional means of communication. With globalization of trade and commerce, it has become imperative for us to teach students to use and adopt electronic devices of communication. With the ushering in of digital technology, ℓ-commerce, Information Technology, and money and services being transacted electronically, the updated knowledge about the electronic medium of communication becomes necessary. The impact of this electronic revolution thus requires a tremendous growth of electronic literature too. "The new technology makes possible ways of presenting information that were previously unthinkable-creating enormous user-searchable bibliographic and numeric data-bases stored in interactive computer system as well as electronic message systems. Publications such as dictionaries, telephone directories and trade journals can now be revised, updated, sub-divided and raised with a degree of flexibility never before known." (2)

Web Content Writing

To achieve optimum desired results from web pages, one has to focus on the specificity and comprehensiveness of the matter. The content can be categorized statistically. Actual digitization and adept use of technical words enables accurate outcome. For instance if an airlines is providing information about comfort zones for tall passengers, then it should include exact figurative details. A good web article will inform you regarding the best possible seat for your height.

Key words play a vital role in web writing. Students should be taught the actual method of using the exact key words to get the desired success. Fragmentation is preferred as against long descriptive sentences, provided they give the necessary information. Studies reflect the fact that people tend to scan and skim on the web rather than read the details. Hence students should be taught to write short and to the point only. The entire web content has to be concise and objective. For web pages to be effective, they have to be easily understandable.

Methodology for Web Content Writing

The pre requisites for a typically ideal web article are that they should have table of contents, additional headings, section summaries, bullets etc. Since the style of academic writing and technical writing differs, learners should be trained in developing the peculiar style necessary for web content writing. The following logical sequence has to be taught:-
1. Creating major Section Headings.
2. Writing the minor points for each part according to logical significance.
3. Putting relevant links next to the corresponding points.
4. Preparing a one sentence summary for each section.
5. Drafting an informative and attractive title.

While teaching the methodology for web content writing, along with the steps mentioned above, the following items should be kept in mind for developing a typical web writing style:-

1. Conciseness is the key factor. This does not mean that on should be taught to be cryptic. Unnecessary omission of articles or other words and phrases confuses the readers.

2. Be specific and clear in whatever you want to write.

3. The message should not be in bits and parts, but as a whole and should give the reader an overall comprehensive view.

4. Editing the written work. Training in editing the written article thoroughly is of utmost importance. Every writer should be taught to edit his own work. Testing the probable readability also has to be analyzed. It should be written in such a way that qualitatively and informatively it should appeal to the interest level of that particular section of readers. Web article editing should be done in such a way that it should appeal at first at the title for some, summary level for others, factual level for some others and at all levels for the detailers.

5. Checking the links is the next important step. The title links given should be relevant to the content given in the link. Unnecessary links with no significance should be avoided. The accessor should get what he desires when he goes to click that link.

   " A common thread between conciseness, scannability and objectivity is that each reduces the user's cognitive load, which results in faster, more efficient processing of information."(3)

'About Us' Writing

The technique of writing 'About Us' columns for organizations, institutions and companies should be taught at college level. Representing a company with a turnover in thousands of crores and having hundreds of different bodies and departments in a few lines to attract the reader's attention is indeed a difficult skill to be developed. The writer of the 'About Us' page should be taught to write in such a way that the reader should get a sense of the

organization after reading the page. Every page should contain one piece of information with links to related and detailed information sources. Training in writing 'About Us' pages must be given at four levels:

- Tag-line Writing

- Summary

- Fact Sheet

- Detailed Information

    ➢ Every accessor comes across the tag-line, which is a brief sentence stating what the organization does. By reading the tag-line, the accessor should understand the contextual relevance of the site.

    ➢ The summary should contain detailed information about the objectives and accomplishments of the organization.

    ➢ This section elaborates the key points and emphasizes the important and striking features of the organization.

    ➢ Detailed information for in depth accessors, who wish to go to the core of certain aspects through additional links.

While training to write the 'About Us' page, the above mentioned points should be focused and it should be kept in mind that, "Trust and credibility are major issues on the Web, where even the biggest company exists as only a few words and pictures in a browser window."(4)

Writing ℓ-mail

With the advent of electronic technology, communication has speeded up a hundredfold. As means of communication ℓ-mailing has broken all geographical barriers and removed the constraints of time and space, and transformed the world into a close knit unit. But on numerous occasions it has been observed that people do not know how to write ℓ-mails in the proper. Scholars and professionals of different fields too have failed to master this art of adding accuracy and effectivity to their ℓ-mails. As adopting these modern means of communication have become obligatory, every individual or professional must not just know, but master the art of effective ℓ-mail writing. "The ℓ-mail, letter or proposal writers who can make a positive connection with their writing will win coworkers' and customers' attention, business, goodwill, and loyalty."(5)

Guidelines for writing effective ℓ-mails should be taught to the students as they would find this as an essential tool of communication in the future. The key factors that are to be kept in mind while writing mails are as follows:-

1. Keep paragraphs and sentences short, but not at the cost of information. Desire to save time due to the cost of net services levied, often forces writers to sacrifice important parts of messages, which has to be avoided.

2. Subject lines should be meaningful. They should be short, to the point and reflective of what is written in the content.

3. Use of only one case has to be avoided. A mixture of upper as well as lower cases is comfortable for the reader. Only upper case symbolizes SHOUTING.

4. Leaving a line blank, between the messages, not just adds to the bytes, but increases the clarity of the message.

5. Fixing errors related to grammar, punctuation and spelling should be learnt.

Teaching ℓ-mail mechanics

Students must know how to tame the technology. The mastering of the ℓ-mail protocol is necessary to achieve competency in this genre of technical and electronic communication. For this, one has to learn to:-

1. Differentiate between formal and informal mails:

Using colloquial words, phrases and conversational style should be avoided. Fragmentation of sentences should be avoided. Offbeat acronyms should not be used. For example, (b'coz,) because and (4u) for you.

2. One subject per mail:

Multiple topics should not be included in an ℓ-mail. It will be difficult for the reader to focus on different topics. Irrelevant themes dilute the message and hence students should be taught to write contextually.

3. Careful clicking of 'send' button

Students should be taught to not just compose the mail, but carefully edit it and send it at the right time. Deals and relationships may be saved by cautiously handling the sending option. To prevent unedited messages from being sent accidentally, the composer should be advised to type the ℓ-mail ID in the end.

Developing Web Sites

Web sites depend on visual content and provide opportunity for giving feedback. A technical web site will require the involvement of professionals, but the language part will be taken care of by the experts in English language. The first step in developing a web site is its proper conceptualization. The purpose of the site, its scope, utility and user centric approach have to be analysed. Web sites may also be broadly classified as sites for sales, information, search portals, educational, personal or entertainment. The site

developer also has to concentrate on ethical, cultural, legal and social issues. The accessibility and usability of the site should also be considered while developing the site. Moreover, the quality and profession of the people who will access the site, has to be kept in mind while planning the linguistic aspects of the site.

Content Development

This is the second step in developing a web site, and involves the maximum role of the writer. He has to edit the matter and also has to convert the document into readable format. Highlighting key points and summarizing sections are important. A content developer has to script the language of the site and monitor the software tools skillfully.

Content Chunking

It is an important aspect of site developing. "The basic written unit of a web page is a content chunk. A content chunk is a stand-alone unit of text and graphics." (6) One content chunk is separated from the other by line spacing. They generally vary from 5to 7 lines and the ones with graphics are lengthier. The students should be taught to resize the document, so as to fit it in a single page. Larger chunks should be displayed with the help of hyperlinks.

Content Suitability

Checking the content suitability on the basis of font, color, size, format, alignment, spacing, etc. is to be taught. Maintaining consistency in style will increase the readability of the site. The site developer should be taught to draft the content in HTML format, so as to enable the browser to read it, print it or download it. The students should know how to prepare the document in Portable Document Format (PDF) or Microsoft Word (.DOC)

Netiquette

Etiquettes that are to be implemented at the time of using electronic communication are called netiquettes. Sajitha Jayprakash says that, "The user friendliness of the electronic medium makes people wrongly believe that there is no such thing as email etiquette. Due to the ease of use, email has the potential to be abused and hence it is important to follow certain guidelines, tips, and etiquettes when writing email." (7)Some specific guidelines are to be followed to ensure that the students who are the future users, become proficient in using the electronic mode of communication because of adequate netiquettes. Given below are some principles of netiquettes:-

Use of formality

General tendency while using electronic communication is to use less formal writing style. But appropriate degree of formality has to be ensured while drafting emails. Using the proper salutation or greeting is also an important pre requisite for writing emails which every professional should know.

Summarizing the message

Mentioning key points of the last transaction can prove beneficial for the receiver. Avoid copying the entire message and focus on summarizing the main aspects only.

Using humor cautiously

Absence of visuals makes the electronic message difficult to comprehend if used humorously or sarcastically. A comment in lighter vein may be misinterpreted and spoil relationships. "Subtle humor tends to get lost in electronic communication; so take steps to make sure that people realize you are trying to be funny. People who use networks have developed a symbol called the smiley face, to indicate humor."(☺) (8)

Copyrights and Privacy

An electronic media writer should know how to protect privacy and copyrights. He should be taught that large parts of articles cannot be copied and reproduced. Adept knowledge in International Copyright Law is mandatory. If a person quotes from a particular article, he should mention the source in the citation index.

Using Cc and Bcc

While sending the mail, the sender should know where to type the address of the recipient. If the mail is to be sent to more than 8-10 people, then all the email addresses may be typed separated by commas. But a Bcc has to be used when the sender doesn't want the recipient to see the other addresses. When a message is sent by typing the addresses on Cc section, then, all the Cc addressees are seen at the top of the message.

Signature

An electronic signature can be typed and kept permanently by a user. But the user has to know that the signature should not exceed 3-4 lines. "Long signatures (over 5 lines) tend to waste resources and are boring to read after the first few times." (9)

Value for time and money has become the ultimate end in today's world. Rapid means of communication has flourished today and will continue to hold a sound footing in the next few decades. Novel and advanced methods of electronic communication will invade the world in the years to come. Hence mastering the already existing means of communication is obligatory for all. Students, who are the professionals of tomorrow, should acquire proficiency in ℓ-English, which will enable them to survive the toughest of competition at global level. Hence training in ℓ-English has to go tangential to the existent syllabus of English for successfully equipping students to meet the challenges of the future.

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