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# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2018)



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# How to Overcome Barriers in English Language Teaching to Engineering Students

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## *Abstract*

The students who scored high marks in Matriculation Examination are admitted to the Technological Universities. English is taught as a compulsory course to all Engineering students, regardless of their specialization, throughout the undergraduate levels. The objectives of this research are to help English teachers to be aware of difficulties in teaching process; to help them create effective teaching environment; and to facilitate learners in their language learning process. This research aims to provide useful insights to teachers experiencing difficulties in their English language teaching under the same environment. In conducting this research, a set of qualitative questionnaire was adapted to investigate the teachers' perceptions and possible barriers of teaching English as a Foreign language (EFL) to Engineering students by collecting the data from (160) English teachers at Technological Universities. The results show that despite having a positive attitude that is an effective way to enhance the language teaching process, teachers agree with barriers hindering the teaching EFL except two items related to insufficient time to engage students in the student-centered approach (SCA) and students' lack of library skill. In conclusion, dealing with barriers of teaching language may be a part of the sustainable development in Engineering education.

*Conference topic: Education and Development*

**Keywords:** *English teaching, Engineering students, barriers, questionnaire, how to overcome.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The English language is, nowadays, taught and learned as one of the most foreign languages in Myanmar. While preparing accreditation bodies that meet the quality of Engineering Education, Engineers are not exception for this teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Every qualified student who passed Matriculation Examination with any subject groups, except specialized art, has an opportunity to apply the Technological Universities in Myanmar according to educational Rule and Regulations. Among them, every University admitted to study Engineering subjects for those who scored high marks by selecting to meet their policy. English is taught as a compulsory course to all Engineering students, regardless of their specialization, throughout the undergraduate levels. What is more, with the exception of Myanmar, subjects which they studied are written in English, and hence,

students need to fulfill English Skills to be able to learn modern Engineering subjects. Technical English and General English are prescribed as textbooks in Engineering Education.

This research paper is an attempt to investigate the teachers' perceptions and possible barriers of teaching technical English as well as General English skills to Engineering students. The objectives of this research are to help teachers of English to be aware of difficulties in teaching process; to help them create effective teaching environment, and to facilitate learners in their language learning process. This research also provides useful insights to teachers who are experiencing difficulties in their English language teaching under the same environment. In other words, knowing how to deal with such issues, teachers may accelerate more integrated techniques to teaching EFL so as to support integration of sustainability into Engineering Education.

The researcher also developed three research questions: (1) What are the EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching English in Engineering Education? (2) What are possible barriers of teachers that would hinder English teaching to Engineering students? and (3) How do teachers overcome these challenges and encourage learners to be interested in language teaching process?. And then, finding teachers' perceptions and possible barriers through research questions and proposals for overcoming these difficulties integrating teachers' attitude with effective techniques are presented.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Engineers should be brilliant not only in their field but also in English skill that comprises of linguistic proficiency and communicative competence along with technical skills. They usually work in groups by cooperating with different people from other countries to handle the problems because the task can seldom be solved by individually. At that condition, non-native English speakers use English as the working language in order to understand and coordinate with other co-workers and accomplish their projects (Talberg, July23-28,2006) (Ms. Malavika Mohapatra, Sep. 2014). In engineering education, English has undoubtedly taken place as a key to gain knowledge and skills which provide not only students' academic life but also their



prospective career to keep abreast of a rapid pace of technological age in today's competitive world. Therefore, students need to master English so that they can comprehensively deal with lectures and lab instructions conducted in English, and understand engineering text books, reference books and scientific and technical journals written in English, and write their project papers and theses.

Universities in higher education have been set up their educational goal to produce graduates with the intellectual skill applied to the real world. Consequently, teachers has significantly played the role of the educational sector in which teachers facilitate students to develop adequate and comprehensive English language skills needed in their studies as well as in their future profession. Taking into account students' wants and expectations, teachers are responsibilities to meet the educational plan by exploring and using effective teaching and learning methods. Attention to this task may cause teachers to face some kinds of difficulties of teaching EFL to Engineering students to reach education quality system that produces ideal outcomes.

#### 2.1 Causes of Barriers

Focusing on teaching and learning process, the researcher would like to propose some barriers encountered in teaching EFL to Engineering Students. Some barriers are as follows:

##### (i) Technical terms

Although few students knew the basic scientific terms at their high school level, the technical terminologies studied in university are unfamiliar with most of the students. Unfortunately, most English teachers encounter difficulty to fulfill students' requirements because they themselves studied linguistic and literature in English Specialization, and have limited technical knowledge.

##### (ii) Extending academic year

Starting from 2013-2014, to be credited a set of university aims and objectives in line with the courses in ASEAN level, five-year degree courses were extended to six-year courses. In this context, the old curriculum and syllabus have been replaced by the new ones, in which teachers need training to deal with teaching learning process effectively.

##### (iii) Large class size

In spite of the fact that the class size is planned to design to limit a class of (50) students, teachers are practically facing to teach the large class of over (80) students. Therefore, they cannot implement learner-centered approach (LCA) in classroom. They usually teach in traditional method instead of using LCA.

##### (iv) Time constraint

Some teachers mentioned that being a lack of time in language teaching is also one of the major issues. In other words, their attitude is that they have not enough time to change student-centered approach which would diminish the amount of content they can teach.

#### (v) Students' perceptions in learning English

Some students are lack of interest in learning English when compared to subjects of Science and Technology. They have a misconception that they do not need to put much effort in language learning because they had learnt English at their basic level and had adequate knowledge in it. Apart from their negative attitude towards English language learning, they fail to recognize how useful English is going to support in their learning process that will lead to a tendency to learn English for short term goal like passing exam.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Method

The researcher used questionnaires to collect data by following the SPSS statistical techniques in analyzing data.

#### 2.2 Participants

The population of the study, for the purpose of exploring teachers' attitude and possible barriers of teaching EFL, comprised (160) English teachers at Technological Universities in the academic year 2017-2018 in Myanmar.

#### 2.3 Instrumentation

The researcher conducted survey items based on questionnaires developed by (AlAsmari T. I., March 24, 2015) (Reigeluth, December 2011). To cope with the aims of the research, the researcher added four likert-scale questions and changed wordings in order to cover two parts, despite originally including open-ended questions in the survey. The first consists of (12) items concerning with teachers' perceptions of English teaching, and the second includes (7) items extracting from possible barriers that would hinder teaching EFL in Engineering Education. The final part is followed by an open-ended question for teachers so as to describe further challenges of teaching EFL to Engineering Students. Likert-scale of four degree (1= Agree, 2= Strongly agree, 3=Disagree, 4=Strongly Disagree) was used to investigate the degree of teachers' perception and assessment of the difficulties. To ensure validity and reliability of questionnaire items, the researcher requested to check these items with (5) experienced English teachers in Engineering Education.

#### 2.4 Data collection

The data were distributed and collected after being filled out by the teachers, and also gathered by sending email to English Department in remote areas. After that, the researcher examined the data with the SPSS statistical analysis methods to find out the findings, and intended to draw proposals how to overcome this situation.

### IV. FINDINGS

Based on the research questions, which have been mentioned in the Introduction section, the findings have been presented. The teachers' perceptions of the survey with the questionnaire items from 1-12 are shown on Table 1 below. It is evident that teachers have a positive attitude of English language teaching to Engineering students.



| No | Teachers' perception                                                                                                              | Mean | Std. Deviation | Disagree % | Agree % |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|------------|---------|
| 1  | I have a predetermined plan how to teach my students.                                                                             | 0.33 | 0.38           | 0.00       | 100.0   |
| 2  | I am an active teacher, and always interested in my field.                                                                        | 0.37 | 0.45           | 0.63       | 99.37   |
| 3  | My students are used to passive learning. They need to change their learning behavior and take part in student-centered approach. | 0.44 | 0.66           | 3.13       | 96.88   |
| 4  | I think learners first.                                                                                                           | 0.35 | 0.34           | 3.75       | 96.25   |
| 5  | I always persuade my students to participate in classroom motivation.                                                             | 0.42 | 0.51           | 5.00       | 95.00   |
| 6  | I am a student-centered teacher, and also have knowledge about student-centered instruction.                                      | 0.40 | 0.39           | 6.25       | 93.75   |
| 7  | I always ask self-assessment and feedback of my students about teaching lessons.                                                  | 0.43 | 0.46           | 9.38       | 90.63   |
| 8  | I have insufficient knowledge to teach technical terminology, and thus, I need teaching technical English training.               | 0.48 | 0.55           | 13.75      | 86.25   |
| 9  | I have enough knowledge about teaching technical English.                                                                         | 0.56 | 0.55           | 40.0       | 60.00   |
| 10 | Students take responsibilities for their learning.                                                                                | 0.67 | 0.43           | 56.88      | 43.13   |
| 11 | I always give lecture with teacher-centered approach because student-centered approach is too time-consuming.                     | 0.69 | 0.65           | 68.13      | 31.88   |
| 12 | Teachers' responsibilities are only to teach prescribed textbooks.                                                                | 0.76 | 0.70           | 80.00      | 20.00   |

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviation and Percentages of teachers' perceptions of teaching English to Engineering students

According to the Table (1), it can be seen that between 90-100% of participants strongly agreed with the first (7) items. To shed more light on teachers' perceptions, the most striking feature of teachers' attitude is their agreement with the point preparing the predetermined plan how to teach their students, which is shown 100% of teachers.

At the same time, teachers proved that they are active teachers and always interested in their field, with 99.37% of respondents and also have knowledge about student-centered instruction, with 93.75% of them. There were the same 96% of participants who believed the technique of learner first in a way that engaging with students leads to implement student-centered approach (SCA) and teachers pointed out needs of changing students' learning behavior and their participating in student-centered classroom. They showed their agreement with asking self-assessment and student's feedback of teaching lessons, which is indicated 90.63% of teachers.

On the other hand, they disagreed with the last 3 perceptions. Data analysis shows that 80% of teachers disagreed with the point that teachers' responsibilities are only to teach prescribed textbooks. Also, 68.12% and 56.88% of participants indicated disagreement with the fact that teachers give lecture using traditional teaching methods because SCA is too time-consuming and students' responsibilities for learning by themselves respectively. It is reported that although more than 86% of teachers have enough knowledge of teaching technical English, 60% of them want to learn more about it. Overall, it is clear that all the teachers are active rather than passive learning and traditional teaching styles.

In order to present the second questionnaire of the research about the possible barriers of teaching in EFL classroom, the Table (2) below displays the respondents' points of view concerning difficulties encountered the teaching English to Engineering Students.

| No | Cause of Barriers                                                                            | Mean | Std. Deviation | Disagree % | Agree % |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|------------|---------|
| 1. | It is necessary to link students' background knowledge and skills with language learning.    | 0.35 | 0.37           | 1.88       | 98.13   |
| 2. | Some students are lack of motivation in language learning.                                   | 0.46 | 0.72           | 3.13       | 96.88   |
| 3. | Teachers encounter difficulty to concentrate the students' English level due to large class. | 0.35 | 0.30           | 7.50       | 92.50   |



|    |                                                                                                                             |      |      |       |       |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 4. | It is insufficient teaching and learning aids, and technology resources to teach students.                                  | 0.49 | 0.67 | 10.63 | 89.38 |
| 5. | Students have not knowledge about student-centered instruction.                                                             | 0.51 | 0.51 | 23.75 | 76.25 |
| 6. | It is not enough time to engage student-centered approach because of the large volume of materials and teaching curriculum. | 0.69 | 0.53 | 63.13 | 36.88 |
| 7. | Students do not know how to use library effectively.                                                                        | 0.68 | 0.78 | 71.25 | 28.75 |

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviation and Percentages of Teachers' points of view of the Possible Barriers

According to the data analysis, it can be seen that teachers approved of (5) barriers mentioned in the questionnaire items from their points of view. However, they showed disagreement with two perceptions. Turning to the detail, 63% and 71% of teachers revealed their disagreement with the point that they had not enough time to implement student-centered approach in the EFL classroom because of the curriculum and large volume of materials and students' lack of knowledge how to use library, respectively.

98.13% of teachers strongly agreed attitudes of linking students' background knowledge and skills with the language learning. They also revealed their agreement with some students' lack of motivation in learning, accounted for 96.88% of the population. These two challenges are the most striking features of teaching learning process which may encounter while teaching EFL. It can also be noticed that 92% of teachers actually encountered difficulty related to large classes in order to concentrate each of the students' English level individually.

Respondents reported that they have positive attitude to engage students in the learner-centered approach in the EFL classroom in spite of teaching to a large number of students. According to the Table 2, participants pointed out that another issue of implementing student-centered approach effectively is insufficient teaching and learning aids and technology resources such as projector, internet facilities, school facilities, language labs, etc. Also, they are really facing a challenge to implement this approach owing to some students' lack of knowledge about learner-centered instruction.

Adding an open-ended question as a part of the research paper related to more possible barriers not included in Table (2) above, most teachers stated that difference in culture may be one of barriers faced by

teachers in teaching English. Both teachers and students seem to have come into conflict with culture in language teaching and learning area that is sharply considered as a fifth skill to teach English 4 skills. Teachers also admitted some students' low language proficiency levels, their attitude relying on the traditional teaching culture, which provides more information, fixed seating arrangements and lack of teacher training.

## V. DISCUSSION and PROPOSAL for OVERCOMING

Having mentioned the possible barriers that would hinder teaching EFL in Engineering Education, the researcher would like to propose some ideas how to overcome these issues. To begin with, even though students have acquired their basic knowledge of English at the basic education level, they fail to understand how to use their skill in higher education. So, teachers need to take into account the students' language levels such as comprehension skill, listening skill, writing skill, dictionary skill, etc. before putting students in teaching learning process. Teachers may then be able to consider what and how to teach them, and how to link their background knowledge and current lessons. Recognizing and understanding students' needs and requirements are the most significant tools in language classroom.

Meanwhile, in order to make use of new textbooks effectively, teachers of English need to be trained how to deal with this new ones, especially the technical English. Moreover, producing qualified teachers equipped with knowledge and language skill will enhance the teaching process and match students' career paths after graduation.

Another point is that though policy makers designed to reduce a class of (50) students three years ago, teachers are practically encountering difficulty to teach the big class of over (80) students. To cope with this crowded classroom environment, most teachers usually deliver a lecture on prescribed textbooks and tend to focus the traditional method in which teachers always provide information or knowledge during the lecture so that they can control the whole class, and consequently, students are not interested in language owing to passive learning method. Otherwise, engaging students in the learner-centered approach in a large class is a hard work. Obviously, teachers' ability of classroom management is one of the major solutions to control the crowded class. It is suitable for a class size of (20) students to support the effectiveness of teaching foreign language. Needless to say, teaching English with overcrowded classroom environment is a challenging task for teachers to be aware of students' English level attentively (Maruyama, 1996). It has necessitated limiting class size to achieve the effectiveness of teaching English. As a result, new teachers need to be recruited and the buildings with modern technology to be constructed.

Furthermore, to be pleased with limited timetable, teachers ought to write out a good lesson plan what and how they teach before starting their teaching lesson. Besides preparing lesson plan, teachers may give



homework assignment to students, pre-reading section and self-study by providing some guidelines as a part of the teaching learning process. In the same way, students must be given opportunities to visit faculty and feel free to discuss their courses and how they are doing.

Next, some students do not pay attention to learning English that has been stated as a cause of barriers. Nevertheless, teachers are responsible for changing students' negative attitude and motivating them to take part in language learning process. Teachers need to explore their students' interests in teaching English by changing various effective techniques and developing their own teaching methods to be equivalent to students' requirements and their English skill level (Haycraft, Revised Impression 1986). Unlike rote-learning method, learner-centered approach (LCA) is the powerful way to get hold of students' interest by engaging them in language teaching activity such as games, group discussions, pair works, etc. with available resources, in spite of recognizing the necessity of teaching learning facilities. By contrast, this approach may sometimes discourage some students' due to their lack of LCA instruction. For example, teachers can introduce the procedure step by step if students are not used to giving instant opinions and do not follow the procedures in classroom. It is possible that the activities will gradually move students to a position where they are more prepared to speak spontaneously in class. Thus, teachers ought to encourage the weaker students to participate in classroom activities by helping them develop cognitive skill, interpersonal skill and learning strategies.

Finally, the researcher would like to discuss that learning a language includes some compromises to learning culture which the language belongs to. Not only teachers but also students may face a conflict between the culture of the target language and that of their mother tongue, which seems to state one of the barriers. To handle this situation, teachers need to be trained as global educators to bring them on platform sharing knowledge on smoothly and effortlessly. Recognizing and understanding differences in culture in language teaching-learning process, teachers help students deal with cultural barriers comfortably by providing cultural knowledge, and letting them expose to new situation of global language determined to meet the aims of teaching culture. To be successful teaching and learning society in higher education, both teachers and students should equally have responsibilities by sharing process.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the researcher examined teachers' perceptions towards teaching EFL and possible barriers encountered while teaching language to Engineering students, and presented the ways how to overcome these issues from the academics points of views. The data analysis reveals teacher's positive attitude in language

teaching and the importance of their institutional role to enhance the students' learning process as well as to provide integrated solutions for sustainability and development in Engineering Education. However, other studies may be carried out to explore challenges teachers mentioned in their response to the open-ended question. To sum up, although the data can be collected from (160) EFL teachers at Technological Universities because of time constraint, it is hoped that this paper will be able to support teachers ways of improvement that contribute to the effectiveness of both teaching and learning environment.

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