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English for Indian Engineering Graduates: Learning and Teaching Strategies

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Abstract

English language has greater relevance in the Indian educational system. Taking into consideration the engineering graduates, learning English has a larger role to play. It enhances the skills, especially in interpersonal communication, as well as provides greater scope for employability in the Indian and International levels. The problem still persists in the approach taken by the graduates towards studying this language as a part of curricula. There is an element of casualness among the Indian students, with which the students approach English language learning as they had already acquired the basic skills in their matriculation levels of learning. Sensitizing students on the need to enhance their language skills is the major challenge that the Indian English Teacher face in the present and this is the chief concern of this study. A change in this system of learning is possible mainly by making the graduates conscious of the outcome of their learning process. Comparisons between the language skills taught in matriculation and graduation in the Indian context of English language teaching would be made. The method used for this study is random data sampling to understand the psyche of the learners through non standardised questionnaire. For this study, two hundred and fifty first year

graduates from varied engineering branches of National Institute of Technology, Karnataka, India had been selected. Data analysis would be done through the use of SPSS tools. The study is of greater significance as similar models of approach can be practiced in other countries for enhancing English language learning skills among graduates.

Keywords

Outcome based language learning, Participatory Learning, Co-operative learning, Project-Based Learning, Foreign Language Acquisition, Engineering Graduates.



Introduction

Outcome based Education is a system of education contributed by the Washington Accord (1989), to the Indian education system. The aim of this system is to provide new potential and assure quality education to the students in higher education. Though this system is successfully implemented in the West, Indian students seldom seem to be aware of it or the possibilities of this system. This is one reason for the students to see education with an element of casualness and ease. Engineering graduates in India have basic science and language as a part of their curriculum. English language is given main orientation in the graduate level learning along with other core subjects of studies. The reason for this is that many of the Indian and International companies mainly rely on effective use of English language and communication skills of the employees as the business deals are mainly done in this language. Hence, English have further possibilities in the education system.

Knowing more on the outcome of learning English language would help the students to excel in the subject so as to get better placements. OBE is now a mandate for accreditation of all institutes of higher learning in India. The National Board of Accreditation insists on outcome in education like the other agencies in India including the NAAC, UGC and the AICTE. The need of the hour is to impart more information to the students on the need to acquire English language learning by making them aware of the outcome. Though reforms

happen in the manner of teaching, selection of teachers and approval of more facilities in institutions, change is still required mainly within the individual as far as the students are concerned and the curriculum design is meant to be. This study intends to focus on the perceptions of two hundred and fifty graduate engineering students of National Institute of Technology, Karnataka which is one of the country's leading technological institutions. These students are pursuing their engineering graduation in the first year from allied specialized areas like Mining, Computer Science, Electrical and Electronics, Mechanical, Chemical and so on. This study focuses on evolving new learning and teaching strategies in English language teaching.

Methodology

For this study, random sampling of the graduates has been adopted as a method as they were pursuing their first year courses on all base areas of science and technology. Two hundred and fifty students of age group between 18-20 years were taken for the study. The sample used consisted of male and female graduates. Data collection was made through the use of non-standardized questionnaire and through observation of their general traits in the class. The questionnaire was conveniently framed as the study was unique and no prior studies were conducted in this area in India before. Hence the questionnaire was designed to adopt to the responses like yes or no, descriptive answers and multiple choices. The questionnaire further covers the important concerns of OBE in English language teaching including participatory learning, co-operative learning, project-based learning, foreign language acquisition, curriculum design, task and problem based learning, learning styles and online learning. The investigator had tried to reach important findings through the inference made from data analysis, observation and interpretation of the questionnaire.

Objectives

- To assess the importance of English language learning through an awareness of OBE among Engineering Graduates in NITK.

- To present information on the perceptions of the students related to English Language acquisition.
- To develop new English language teaching methods suiting Engineering classrooms.

Results

For this study, data was collected using the questionnaire method from two hundred and fifty graduates of NITK who are pursuing their first year engineering.

For the first question, (Fig 1) two hundred and thirty five respondents mentioned that they are aware of the outcome of learning English as a course in their engineering curricula and fifteen of them were unaware of it.

For the second question, (Fig.2) on their familiarity with Outcome based education which is a criterion for enhancing quality education in the country one hundred and thirty five respondents claimed that they are aware of the concept. But one hundred and fifteen of the respondents were unaware of the same.

For the question on the confidence level of the graduates of their English speaking skills as they have reached their graduation; (Fig. 3) one hundred and sixty two of them agreed that they are confident. Thirty four of them strongly agreed. Forty two of them neither agreed nor disagreed. Ten disagreed and two of them completely disagreed.

For the query on the improvement of the graduates on their English language skills, compared to their matriculation and under graduate studies, (Fig. 4) one forty six agreed that their skills have improved in graduation compared to matriculation and under graduation. Thirty five strongly agreed to this point. Forty five neither agreed nor disagreed. Twenty four disagreed that their skills have improved and none strongly disagreed.

While enquiring about the role of project based learning in English language acquisition through the use of technological aids to investigate, navigate or locate resources, (Fig.5) one forty two agreed that it would enhance

English language acquisition. Sixty three strongly agreed that there is a pivotal role played by technology in enhancing language skills. Forty graduates neither agreed nor disagreed. Five of them disagreed and none strongly disagreed.

The graduates were asked whether they changed roles in their graduate level English courses to asking questions and building knowledge and its role in increasing their language skills. For this question, (Fig. 6) one hundred and twenty of them agreed that they had been more interactive in the classes. Thirty eight of them strongly agreed that it has enhanced their language skills. Sixty four graduates neither agreed nor disagreed. Twenty eight disagreed and none of them strongly disagreed.

The graduates were further asked about the possibilities of placements through the aid of English language skills acquired in their graduate level compared to the matriculation and undergraduate studies. For which (Fig.7) one sixty six of them strongly agreed that it will enhance their placement. Eighty of them agreed. Four of them were neutral and none disagreed nor strongly disagreed.

The graduates were further asked whether participatory learning and cooperative learning were the special features of their graduate level courses compared to the undergraduate and matriculation courses (Fig. 8). One thirty six of them agreed that it was a special feature. Sixty five strongly agreed that it was a unique feature. Thirty nine of them were neutral. Ten graduates disagreed and none strongly disagreed.

The graduates were further asked (Fig. 9) on the need of online facilities and language labs and its capability in enhancing the acquisition of English. One twenty of them agreed that it enhances the capability of acquisition of English. Seventy nine of them strongly agreed that online learning facilities would enhance learning. Thirty six of the graduates neither agreed nor disagreed. Fifteen of them disagreed and none strongly disagreed.

On inquiring with the graduates that task based and problem based learning would help in learning English language easier (Fig. 10), one hundred

and twelve agreed. Eighty eight strongly agreed. Forty neither agreed nor disagreed. Ten disagreed and none strongly disagreed.

For the question on some styles of learning English language other than textual method (Fig.11) seventy four of them gave suggestions for new learning styles. Whereas one seventy six of them did not comment.

For the query on some unique English teaching methods (Fig.12) that could be included in the design of curriculum two hundred and thirty nine of them did not provide any response. Eleven of them commented on some changes that could enhance teaching further. The suggestions are included in the discussion.

Discussion

Teaching English in the Graduate level especially for engineering graduates in India is a challenging task. The reason behind this is mainly due to their multi-linguistic culture where majority of them speak Indian ethnic languages. Communication of emotions, ideas, attitudes and acquisition of knowledge happens mainly in their ethnic language. Initially, the education system in India had not given enough focus on foreign language like English. It was taught by teachers who handled other science or arts subjects. This is one reason for lack of meticulous teaching of English language. This had affected the acquisition of English skills of the students during their matriculation and under graduation. The new system of education in India is more quality centred, especially with the implementation of Outcome Based Education as a new strategy of teaching. Slowly it is becoming a part of the curriculum design. Based on this strategic teaching students are slowly made aware of the Outcome of Educating themselves in English.

English is an international language and it is important for people to engage in varied occupations, technological development, trade, commerce and to bring in more research and international deals. By making the graduates aware of these possibilities and ability for individual development, the students would understand the necessity of acquiring English skills for communication

this is what exactly OBE does. This would further generate success in all the endeavours that they indulge in.

Outcome based education has multiple strategies in built in its texture including participatory learning, co-operative learning, project based learning, foreign language acquisition, curriculum design, task and problem based learning, learning styles and online learning, to state some. Using all these strategies as teaching techniques, could enhance language acquisition as is clearly evident through the survey that had been conducted using questionnaire method of data collection. Matriculation and under graduation teaching was mainly meant for familiarising English language through teaching the students about the underlying grammatical structure and base application of language for communication. But, in graduation the study has more turned to application level which is the root cause of the drastic change that had happened in the way in which the graduates perceived the role of language. Skill, task based and problem based learning is the base for this success. In graduation more emphasis is given on placement hence the curriculum is designed in such a way that it would meet all the requirements of placement screening including group discussion, public speech, report writing, mock interviews and meetings. Students are also expected to know organising skills for conferences, seminars, meetings and symposiums. This would bring in more scope for inter cultural interaction and cross cultural communication among the diverse community of graduates in English. Online learning facilities could enhance the learning process especially with networking including moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) and other related software. Language lab is also proved to be a best method to enhance the learning process as there are many ELT software that enhance the learning process through interaction with the graduates. Grouping the students and engaging interactive session would be a good method to enhance their skills. Language lab would further assist them with self-learning so that they can repeat those areas where they need to improvise. Using teaching strategies including language games, puzzles, language riddles etc. would generate interest among the students. The

suggestions given by graduates related to self-learning need to be discussed at this juncture. Self-learning could be enhanced through watching language movies, cartoons and theatrical performances in English. Doing projects, engaging in creative writing in the form of short essays and prose pieces, playing word games online could further enhance this skill. Use of English dictionaries in translation to ethnic tongue would help one built vocabulary. Writing exercises is another effective way to enhance language acquisition. Most important way for mastering language is to converse to everyone in English.

Some of the important English teaching techniques are mind mapping whereby large quantity of information could be brought in the form of English visuals. GD's, presentations in the form of speech and oral word spelling games would help one to build vocabulary. Survey methods in English could also help one to enhance communication skills. Framing language clubs with English activities is also another technique to have more of interaction among the students and the teacher. Giving more newspaper related assignments, projects for home work, you tube and other video based assignments would enhance one's skills. Another method a teacher can apply in class room is to bring experts in English from other institutions to speak on the area. Bringing placement teams for observation on the class room activities and getting suggestions from them would enhance the teaching.

Conclusion

Using techniques of outcome based learning would be the most practical strategy to implement in English classrooms for the multi-cultural Indian engineering graduates. Use of techniques including participatory learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, foreign language acquisition, curriculum design, task and problem based learning, learning styles and online learning are found to have positive implications and are suggested for recommendation in English classrooms across the globe.

List of Figures

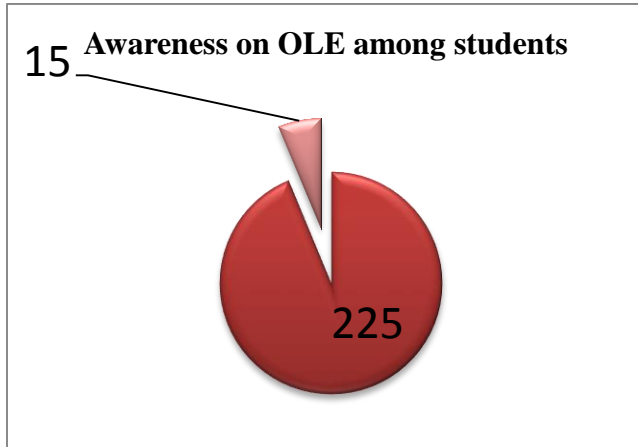


Fig.1

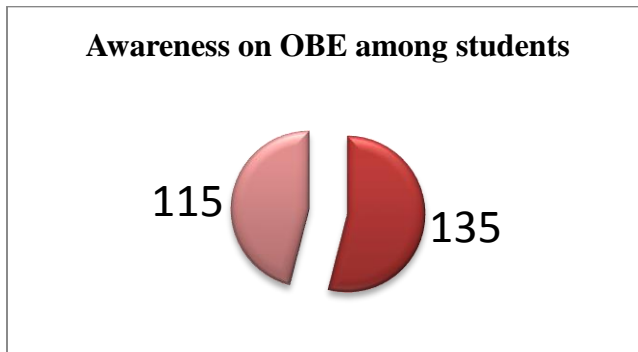


Fig. 2

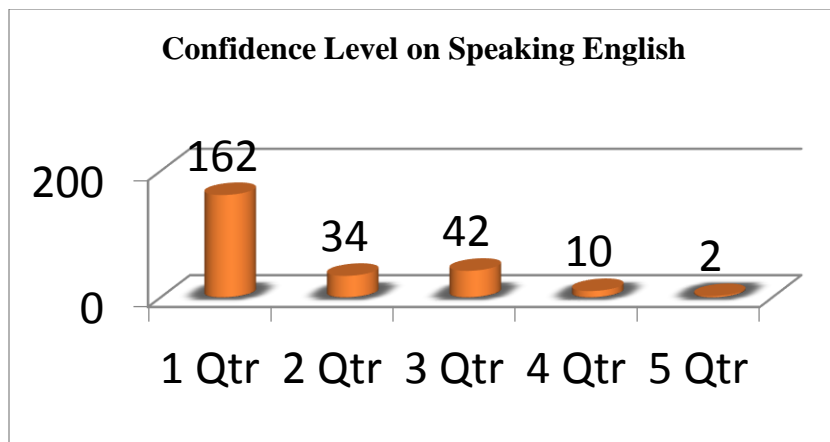


Fig.3

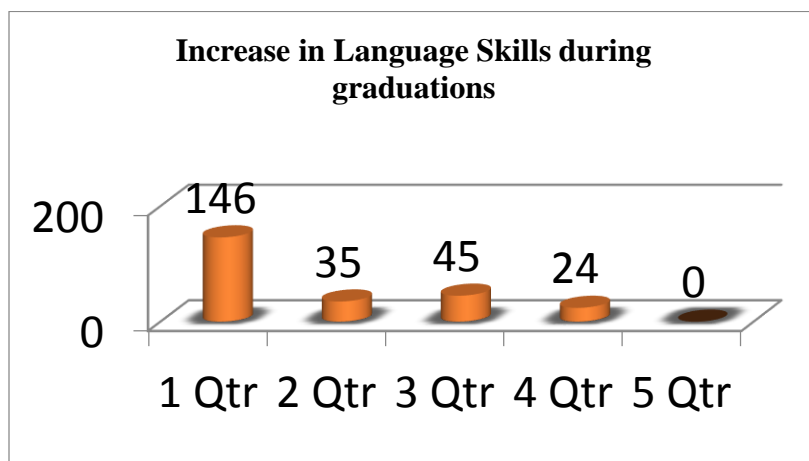


Fig. 4

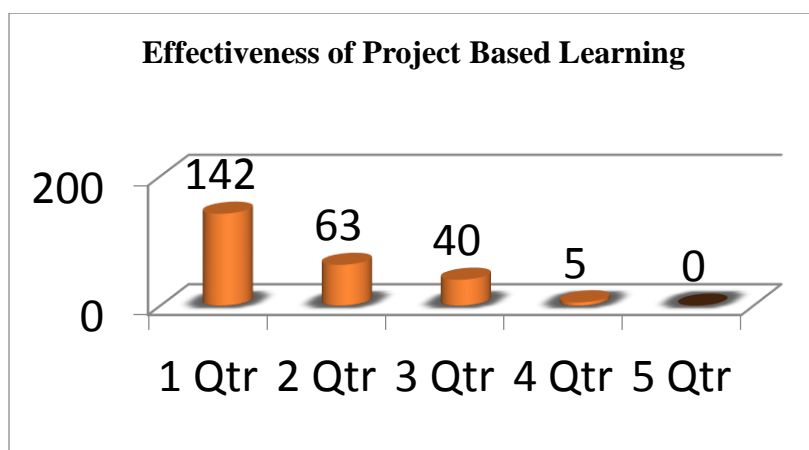


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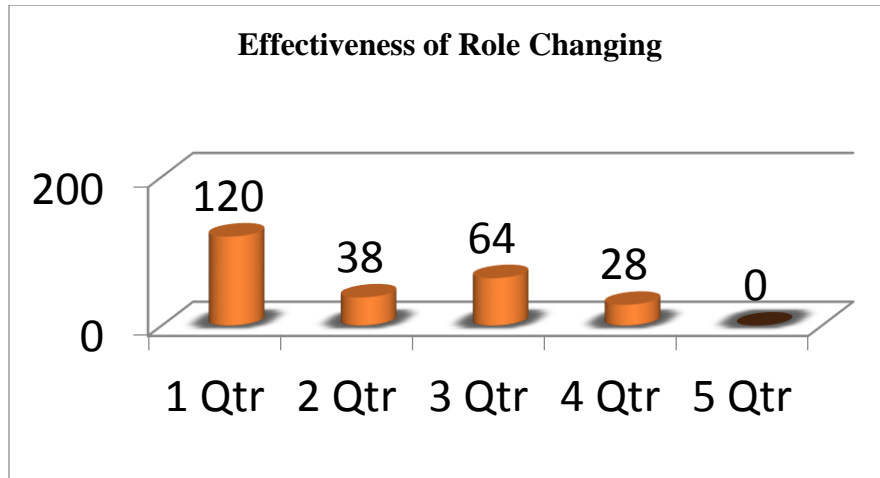


Fig.6

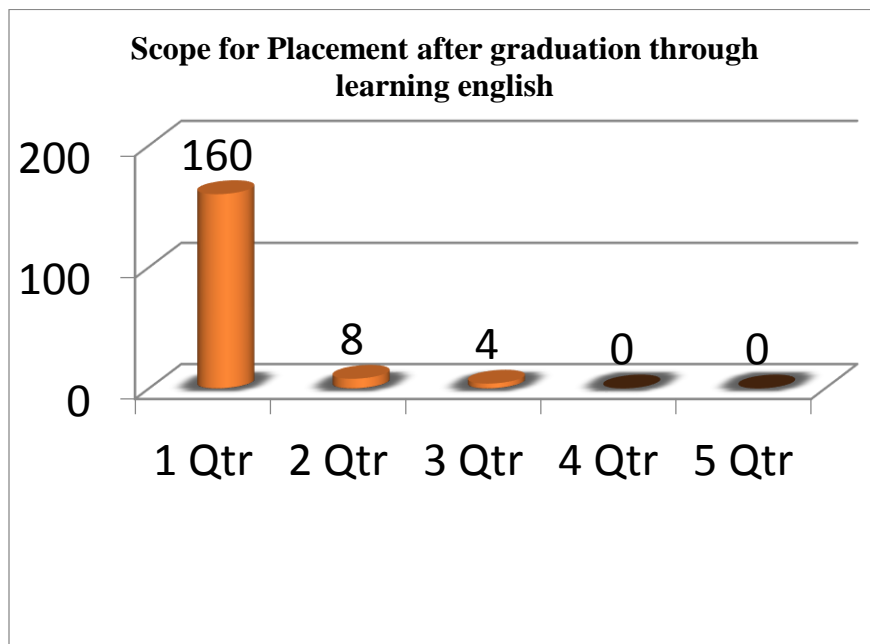


Fig. 7

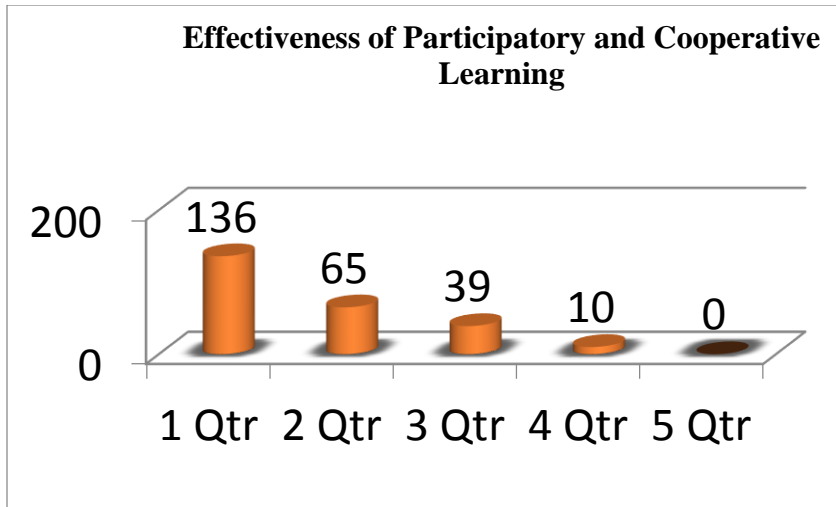


Fig. 8

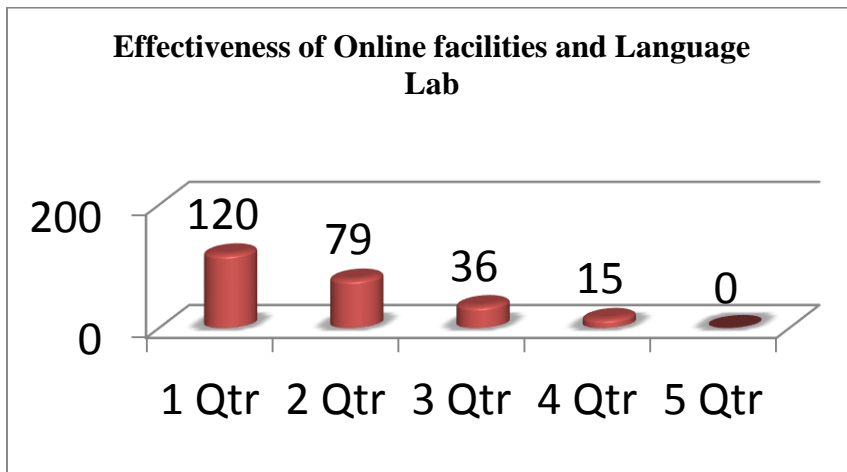


Fig. 9

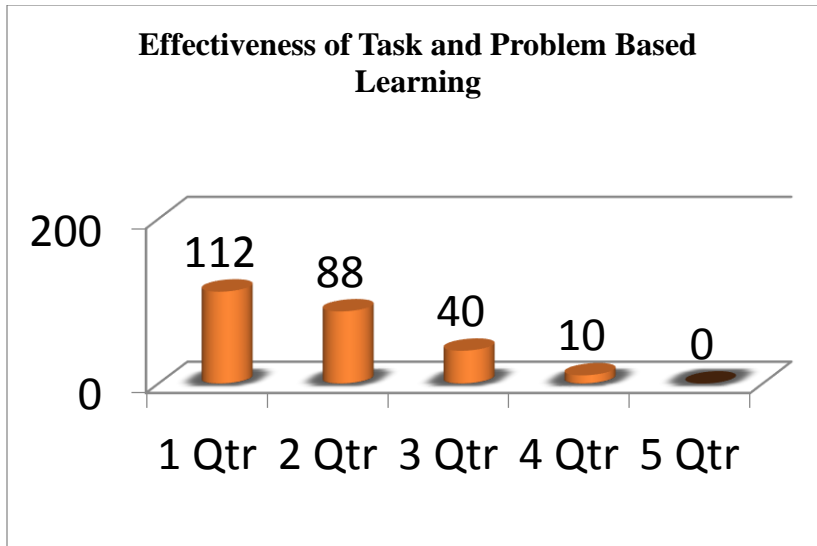


Fig. 10



Fig. 11

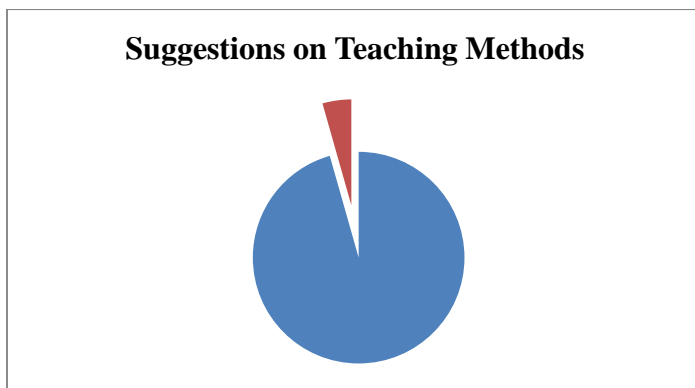


Fig. 12

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Instructions:

This questionnaire is a part of a study conducted on English Language Learning and Teaching Strategies with special focus on OBE in order to understand the perception among the first year engineering graduates in NITK. Kindly provide the respondents details before filling up the answers. The questionnaire carries Yes or No choice, Multiple Choice and Descriptive answer filling slots. Kindly spare few minutes to fill up the same.

Respondents Name, Age and Gender:**Institution Name, Year of Studies and Specialization:**

1. Are you familiar with the outcome of learning English Language as a course in engineering curricula?

Yes No

2. Are you aware of the term Outcome Based Education?

Yes No

3. As you have reached the graduate level of education you are confident over your English language skills.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

4. Your language skills have improved much compared to the matriculation and under graduate studies.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

5. Project Based Learning that includes technological aids to investigate, navigate or locate resources will help in English language acquisition.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

6. While pursuing graduate level English courses you have changed your role to ask questions and build knowledge.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

7. English language skills acquired in the graduate level would enhance your possibilities for placements.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

8. Participatory learning and co operative learning are the special features of the graduate level English course compared to the undergraduate and matriculation courses.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

9. Online facilities and language labs would enhance the acquisition of English.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

10. Task Based and problem based learning would help in learning English language easier.

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree
Strongly Disagree

11. Mention some styles of learning English language other than textual method.

12. Mention some unique English teaching methods that could be included in the design of curriculum.

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