

A Study on Ameliorating Indian Engineering Students' Communication Skills in Relation With CEFR

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Abstract—In the globalized world, English is known as the International language. The engineering professionals have to possess good communication skills to be successful in their career. Communication skills have become one of the employability skills in current scenario. The communication skills of today's engineering professionals are considered to be in the beginner level (in Tamilnadu, India) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that is to test the ability of individual's language proficiency. This may be due to the lack of interest in enriching the listening and speaking skills. This study focuses on enhancing the standard of the communication skills by improving the listening and speaking skills.

Index Terms—communication skills, CEFR level, grammar translation method, language proficiency, listening, speaking, and productive learning

I. INTRODUCTION

“Communication” plays a significant role in the professional field. It has its influence in all fields and in our day-to-day lives. Communication a vital part plays a key role which is essential for an individual to survive. It is used to encourage, connect, share, knowledge gaining etc. If there is no clear communication there persist misunderstandings. In reality, the significance of communication is not known by many. If everyone is aware of the word ‘Communication’, they will realize its importance and impact. Communication means sharing of ideas, thoughts, information, etc. (Kumar Sanjay & Lata Pushpa, 2011). Without sharing, data analysis, survey, new invention, innovation etc. are not possible. That is without communication there is no progress in any field. Consequently, to be successful in life and career, one should possess good communication skill.

The language for communication has to be chosen according to the person to be communicated with. If one wants to go for a universal language, which leads to the worldwide opportunity and success, there comes the global language “English.” Consequently, everyone wants to excel in communication. The same is the case of the budding engineers too.

This study has been made on the basis of the engineering syllabus of Anna University, Tamilnadu, India and also discusses how far it is helpful for the students to enrich their communication skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammar Translation Method (GTM) produces students with a good mastery of English grammar. But they may perhaps lack in using English effectively in oral communication. In contrast students speaking ability is lined up over grammatical competence in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Here the emphasis is on achieving both fluency and accuracy in communication (Hymes, 1966).

There is unanimity that English for Specific Purpose (ESP) course curriculum should be designed in light of a needs analysis (2016). Yet, astonishingly, there are very few discussions in light of data on the curriculum development and evaluation of the curriculum in ESP.

It is pointed out by Prensky (2001) that the present time learners are different from those of the past where current curricula, tools, and methods have not subsisted up to their changes and expectations.

Shelley et al. (2013), after analyzing the findings of 37 studies that have tested computer assisted language learning, concluded that technology-enhanced L2 teaching is equally effective when compared to L2 teaching without technology. Furthermore, the findings of some studies included in their meta-analysis have shown that technology-enhanced L2 teaching has resulted in better outcomes than L2 teaching without technology.

Second language acquisition refers the speaker's ability in using a second language effectively and functionally in a truthful communicative setting. 'Functional ability would depend largely on context' is agreed by Language scholars and linguists (Bagaric & Djigunovic, 2007).

To meet learners' needs, the use of technology in education can be adjusted Crawford (2002). Research has shown that utilizing technology in L2 teaching and learning has provided evidence of effectiveness on language learning. Advanced solutions are there for several language learning issues.

Tarvin (2014) synthesizes the various interpretations of communicative competence into a single, contextually relevant, definition –the ability to use language, or to communicate, in an appropriate manner not only to make meaning but also to accomplish social tasks with efficacy and fluency through extended interactions. A non-native English speaker is judged to have acquired communicative competence if a person could convey his/her ideas correctly and fluently in culturally acceptable situations.

Alzebaree and Hasan (2020) conclude that the broadly used language in the world is English. It is the language of Preeminence. Because of the rapidly increasing growth in science and technology, trade, and international relations, etc., the world has become a small city having English as its primary language

III. IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR THE MODERN ENGINEER

Many comparative analyses have shown the outcome of most graduates that they have analytical and problem solving skills, domain specific knowledge and key decision making abilities through their domain engineering degrees. Communication skills of many candidates had improved according to their engineering education (Marc, 2007). Due to the globalization of world markets, the emergence of English as the first language of engineering worldwide has required that graduate engineers be well equipped with not only technical knowledge but also communicative competence. This is because their success in their professions lies on them having a good command of English language (Rajprasit et al., 2014).

Moreover, as Sheth (2016) contended, employers are no more interested in looking for engineering nerds who would spend their working hours busy with calculators and machines. Rather, preference is given to those who are capable of using English for efficacious communication, expressing ideas clearly within the purview of workplace communicative events. However, many reports have shown that despite the expertise of graduate engineers in their practical oriented disciplines, a vast number of these professionals lack the English speaking skills necessary for technical discussions, business negotiations and daily conversations with foreign counterparts and customers (Gashaye 2015; Singh & Kaur, 2019).

How could the budding Engineers hone their communication skills? As communication is a valuable enhancer of their career, one has to pay key attention. Employers need engineers with congenial communication skills. The candidates who pursue engineering degree have technical proficiency to execute their career. The company expects the candidates to communicate their outcome with others in a diligent manner.

They assume most people who graduate with an engineering degree have the technical expertise to perform their jobs. In today's world, it is essential for an engineer to acquire effective communication skills which is to be considered as one of the determiner of success in one's professional career. To impress the employers the engineers should possess an effective communication skill to complete a task. To reach a good height in business and be successful effective communication is indispensable. To establish a strong rapport between employees, communication is needed.

A. Syllabus Designing

Helping students develop communication skills is one of the main focuses in engineering education. Because English has been adopted as the lingua franca in engineering, improving student scores on standardized English tests is often recognized as central for global communication education. In lieu of this, Engineering syllabus is designed after minded the problems faced by the engineers and the need for the effective communication skills. To explain, Anna University, Tamilnadu, India syllabus is taken here. In the present syllabus, students are having Communicative English and Technical English paper in their first two semesters and also have three English labs (Interpersonal Skills – Listening and Speaking, Advanced Reading and Writing, Professional Communication) in the following semesters in second and third year. Importance is given for the four macro skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW). Each unit has topics in Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Language and Vocabulary development. In the third semester, they are having Interpersonal Skills- Listening & Speaking lab, fourth semester Advanced Reading Skills and in fifth semester Professional Communication Lab.

The syllabus highlights the macro skills Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. But, the students are still lacking in communication skills. Now a big 'WHY' appears in our mind? The reasons are: Though LSRW are included in the syllabus, there are no processes to evaluate and test Listening & Speaking skills during the end semester examination. It focuses much on Writing and Grammar. Reading skill has got a little focus too. Consequently, practicing the listening and speaking modules are procrastinated. The reasons for the lack of effective communication skills are explicit now. Urban students with their strenuous effort master in those skills. Majority of the students fail to excel the macro skills and they are not able to communicate effectively.

Even though the number of University, Colleges, and Programs are increasing, the lack of quality in education also exists. The way of imparting education usually differs according to the place of domicile (Tier 1 Company – Urban and Tier 2 Company – Semi-urban, and Tier 3 Company – Rural).

Basically the Tier 3 areas have the insufficient infra structure for developing specific knowledge in particular skills especially in Listening and Speaking Skills. Though the syllabus is being updated regularly by the Governing bodies for Education, the students lag in Communicative skills. Though Bloom's Taxonomy and performance indicators are encouraged in Teaching – Learning process, the students are not able to meet out the CEFR level particularly in Listening and Speaking Skills while they pursue their higher studies and go to work in abroad.

Due to the lack of communication skills, the students are not able to join in a reputed Multi National Corporation (MNC). As they have to communicate with international customers, lack of communication skills becomes a big obstacle in their career. In the same way soft skills are also ignored in educational institutions. To know more about the level of engineering students in CEFR level a survey was conducted by Times of India and is quoted below. A survey was conducted at 2019 among 1,50,000 students (India Today - 16).



Figure 1 Indian Engineering Graduates Level in CEFR for Languages

B. Common European Frame Work of Reference (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is to test the ability of individual language proficiency. The CEFR framework describes language communication competencies at six specific levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2 which can also be categorized into three levels: Basic User (A1 & A2), Independent User (B1 & B2), and Proficient User (C1 & C2). Each level is described using a set of Can-do statements that specify what the learners of a language are capable of in particular situations and contexts where communication takes place. Such statements are also called descriptors. Can-do statements not only can be utilized to assess a learner's communication level in specified situations and contexts but they can also identify learner's communication goals that must be attained for particular situations and contexts. The six CEFR levels have been further subdivided into sublevels (for example, A1+ or B1+) in practical uses of CEFR-based references (Cambridge University Press, 2013). With the help of CEFR the employers and educational institutions can easily compare our qualifications to other exams in their country.

IV. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

To explore the research lacuna between the syllabus designing and engineering graduates' communication skills, a pilot study has been made. For this study, Normative Survey Method has been used. Normative survey method analyzes and describes what exists at present. They are concerned with existing condition or relations, prevailing practices, beliefs and attitudes etc. Such investigations are termed in research literature as Descriptive Survey or Normative Survey. The term Normative implies the determinations of typical conditions and practices. The term survey suggests the gathering of evidences related to prevailing conditions or practices.

A. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the reason for the students level in CEFR level by learning the prescribed syllabus.
2. To suggest with the suitable methods to improve the learning standard to meet the CEFR proficiency level.
3. To understand the influence of the Computer-Based Technologies in developing the sample respondents' language skills.

For the study, a questionnaire was prepared and was administered to the students of Engineering Colleges Affiliated to Anna University and Autonomous Engineering College under Anna University in different locality.

B. Research Hypotheses

For the analysis, two hypotheses are framed.

1. A significant relation exists between the effective use of English Language Lab and enhancing the LSRW Skills of the sample Respondents.

2. There is a significant relation between utilization of Computer-Based Technologies and acquiring English Language Skills (LSRW Skills).

C. The Questionnaire and Data Collection

For the study, a questionnaire was prepared and was administered to the students of Engineering Colleges Affiliated to Anna University and Autonomous Engineering College under Anna University in different locality. The questionnaire consists of 22 questions. The questions are about the sample respondents' personal details, their knowledge about CEFR level, their standard in LSRW skills, and the same with the utilization of English lab and Computer-based technologies. Nearly 500 respondents were selected for the study.

D. Data Analysis

After gathering the questionnaires the results of each respondent were checked. Out of 500 sample respondents 481 responses were received and 467 responses (97%) were taken into account for correlation. Pearson's product correlation is used to determine the significant relation between enriching students LSRW Skills and usage of CBT's and English Lab. The collected data was analyzed with SPSS software. For this paper data purification method implies that it has no missing data, no out layers and normality is between -1.96 to + 1.96. It has 95% confident interval.

E. Results and Discussion

To visualize the impact of English Lab and Computer-Based Technologies in enriching the LSRW Skills, the data collected from the sample respondents were analyzed on the basis of the hypothesis framed by the researcher.

N–Total number of sample respondents

To satisfy hypothesis 1, correlation has been made between question 20 that is about the utilization of English lab and the questions 9, 11, 13 and 15 which are about the LSRW skills. The table given below shows the correlation.

TABLE 1
IMPACT OF ENGLISH LAB ON LSRW SKILLS

		Capable of understanding classroom lectures	Capable to communicate in English	Ability to read and comprehend text books	Able to convert Lectures into notes
English Lab_ LSRW Skill	Pearson Correlation	.274**	.345**	.335**	.223**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	467	467	467	467

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson product correlation of lab utilization and output of understanding classroom lecture is found to be low positive and statistically significant ($r = .274$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation for the use of English Lab in enriching the capability to communicate effectively is found to be low positive and statistically significant ($r = .345$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation for the extended use of English Lab in enriching the ability to Read and Comprehend the text books are low positive and statistically significant ($r = .335$, $p < 0.001$). Pearson product correlation for the extended use of English Lab in enriching the Writing Skill – converting lectures into notes is also found to be low positive and statistically significant ($r = .223$, $p < 0.001$).

The correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). It is understood from the above table that the effective use of English lab enhances the sample respondents Listening, Speaking, Reading & Writing Skills. Hence H1 was accepted.

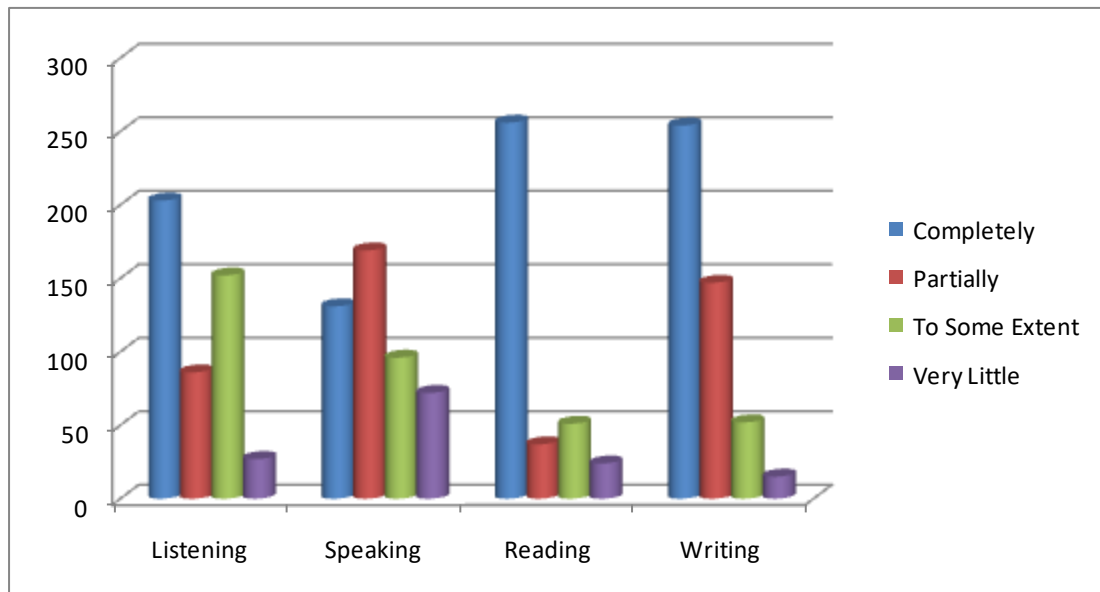


Figure 2 Respondents' Stand in LSRW Skills

The Figure 2 shows that the number of students who have given the responses completely and partially is low in listening and speaking skills when compared with reading and writing skills. At the same time, the responses for to some extent and very little are high in listening and speaking when compared with that for reading and writing. If the listening and speaking skills are enhanced with an extended and regular utilization of English lab, the responses of completely and partially for listening and speaking will also increase. This has been proved in the correlation too. It also results in rising of the student's level in CEFR.

To satisfy hypothesis 2, correlation has been made between question 19 that is about the effective use computer-based technologies and the questions 10, 12, 14 &16 which are about the LSRW skills. The table given below shows the correlation:

TABLE 2
RELATION BETWEEN CBT AND LSRW SKILLS

		CBT - Listening	CBT - Speaking	CBT - Reading	CBT - Writing
CBT_LSRW_Skill	Pearson Correlation	.162**	.383**	.235**	.267**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	467	467	467	467

The correlation of Computer – Based Technologies and output of Listening skill is low positive and statistically significant ($r = .162, p < 0.001$). The correlation with CBT in enhancing the Speaking Skill is found to be low positive and statistically significant ($r = .383, p < 0.001$). The Pearson product correlation for the CBT in enhancing the Reading Skill is low positive and statistically significant ($r = .235, p < 0.001$). Likewise, the correlation for the extended use of CBT in enhancing the Writing Skill is low positive and statistically significant ($r = .267, p < 0.001$). The correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). From the above table, it is inferred that the effective use of CBT's enhances the sample respondents Listening, Speaking, Reading & Writing Skills. Hence H2 was accepted.

Pearson product correlation clearly shows that the continuous use of Computer-based Technologies has a positive impact on the sample respondents in converting the classroom lectures into notes and found to be low positive and statistically significant.

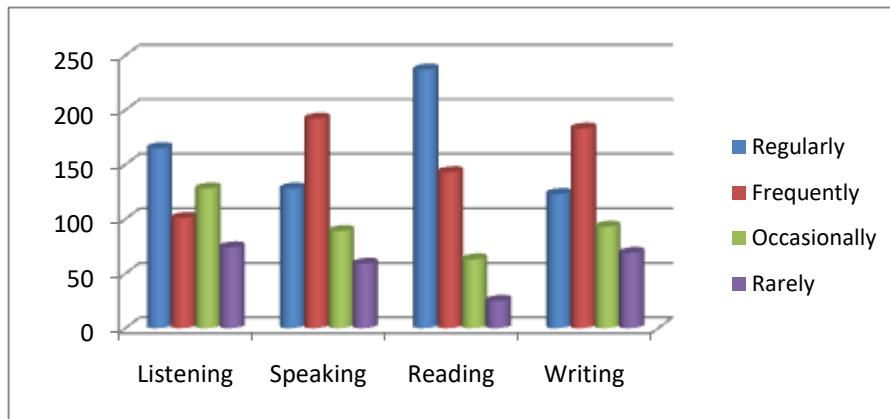


Figure 3 Sample Respondents' LSRW Skills With Relation to CBT

It is clear from Figure 3 that the responses for listening are less when compared with that of reading. The options completely and partially are high in reading and to some extent and very little are high in listening. It is inferred that much importance is given for reading and less is for listening. At the same time, the responses for speaking and writing are more or less same. Obviously, it is the result of the exercise varieties provided by CBT. It may be interesting to the students and attract them. If the practice for listening is increased, listening skill will be enhanced. Naturally, it results in the improvement of students' standard in CEFR level.

TABLE 3
ENGLISH LAB AND PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

		English Lab	Proficiency in English
English Lab	Pearson Correlation	1	.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	467	467
Proficiency in English	Pearson Correlation	.365**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	467	467

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is known from the above table that English Lab plays an effective role in enriching the sample respondents' proficiency in English. The correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson product correlation clearly shows that the effective use of English Lab has a positive impact on the sample respondents.

TABLE 4
ENGLISH LAB IN ENRICHING THE VOCABULARY

		English Lab	Vocabulary
English Lab	Pearson Correlation	1	.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	467	467
Vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	.365**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	467	467

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the Table 4, it is clear that English Lab plays an effective role in enriching the sample respondents' vocabulary. The correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). Pearson product correlation shows that the effective use of English Lab has a positive impact on the sample respondents' vocabulary.

TABLE 5
ENGLISH LAB AND STUDENTS' ABILITY IN CLEARING THE ENGLISH COURSES

		English Lab	Clearance of English course
English Lab	Pearson Correlation	1	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.152
	N	467	467
Clearance of English course	Pearson Correlation	.066	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.152	
	N	467	467

The table 5 explicit the efficient utilization of the English Lab has enriched students' ability in clearing the English Courses such as: BEC/IELTS/TOEFL since Pearson product correlation is significant (2- tailed).

The table 6 proves that most of the students were not aware of the CEFR level. They usually realize it when they go to abroad for higher study and work. Knowledge in using Computer-Based Technology will help them to improve their LSRW skills. The correlation is given below.

TABLE 6
CBT AND RESPONDENTS' CEFR LEVEL

		Computer-Based Technology	Awareness about CEFR
Computer-Based Technology	Pearson Correlation	1	.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.549
	N	467	467
Awareness about CEFR	Pearson Correlation	.028	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.549	
	N	467	467

As Pearson product correlation is significant (2- tailed), it can be assumed that Computer-Based Technology has a positive role in improving the students' level in CEFR level.

V. FINDINGS

The sample respondents' responses and the correlations made the researcher prove the fact that English Lab and Computer-Based Technologies have a positive impact on enriching the LSRW skills. Computer and Internet plays the dominant role in the English Lab. There students get a chance to learn at their own pace with the assistance of their faculty. Moreover, there are plenty of softwares which are useful to learn the communication skills such as Globarena and ODLL. These softwares are installed in the English Lab for the students. When students practice the exercises in these software's during their English Lab, they get a chance to enhance their communication skills. Apart from the regular classes, these softwares try to educate in a different and interesting way. Practice exercises are given in different forms. Drag and drop, choose the right one, True or False, Listen and catch the word, Listen and do the Role play, etc.

The modules have separate practices for Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Sample exercises are also given. The students can repeat the exercises for multiple times. As they learn in their own time and way, this may become interesting to them. That is the reason for the positive result that was attained in the correlation Table 1 and the Figure 2 explicit the same.

The same is the case of Computer-Based Technologies too. Once the students start using the Computer-Based Technologies for learning, thousands of materials and websites are available for them. They also become familiar with the up to date development and changes in the learning process. When compared to English lab, CBT can provide a variety of exercise modules. As softwares are installed for the English lab, students have to practice the same exercises again. In CBT, they may go for various websites and get variety of exercises. In this way, when looking for foreign opportunities for their higher studies and work, they naturally know about the CEFR for languages and means to reach the right level. Online learning modules, whether free or paid, are available for them. Thus, if they know how to utilize the Computer-Based Technologies in the apt way, they can easily be successful in their goal.

As discussed earlier the engineering syllabus has been designed to hone the students' communication skills. If every chain of the wheel runs smoothly, what may be the reason for the student's standard in CEFR level. Thinking ahead of this for a while is needed here. This may be due to the absence of efficiency in learning process.

One may realize this in many aspects. For example, Question paper pattern, the way of conducting lab exams, handling the English lab hours, etc. Let us see some facts in a detailed way. In English, topics are there for LSRW skills. At the same time, the question pattern for the end semester exam focuses only on writing, reading and grammar part only. As a result, the necessary focus is not given to listening and speaking skills. The main focus is obviously given to score good marks. Students attend the English lab with the mind set of scoring minimum marks. Most of the students are not interested to actively participate in the LSRW activities during the lab hours. For example, Listening – Listening for the main idea, Speaking – Participating in the conversation, Group Discussion, Reading – Reading the articles and providing the answer, Writing – Report writing, Letter writing.

This is the reason for the "Times of India report- 2019." They give their main focus for attaining marks instead developing communication skills. This becomes a big threat for them when they appear for the Tier 1 companies and applying for the foreign universities. As English is a second language, students try to neglect the opportunities for acquiring knowledge whenever the chance is available. To overcome this, the instructors may use interactive tasks, which can be implemented within a productive method of teaching to develop students' communication skills. The productive method is the method of teaching that involves usage of various interactive teaching technologies and electronic educational resources. In engineering the following interactive teaching technologies are applicable: problem-based discussions and debates, role-playing games, written tasks related to the future professional activities of students, storytelling, and collaborative learning.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study recommends an effective use Computer-Based Technology and English Lab on communication skills for undergraduate students as a measure to fill in the identified communication vacuum between students with work place expectation and higher studies meet outs. There is a strong need for learning materials that are more in sync with the needs of the present generation engineering professionals. In the learning process, the topics prescribed in the syllabus are highly interactive and will trigger to meaningful communication. Here, equal importance is given for the LSRW skills. Instead of neglecting listening and speaking skills, if equal focus is given to the four skills, students' language skill will be improved and resulted in the hone up of effective communication. Hence, students' standard in CEFR level will be raised automatically.

APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of the student :
2. Gender : Male/Female
3. Medium of instruction up to Hr.sec :
4. Place of domicile : Rural/Urban/Semi-urban
5. Name of the college in which studying? : -----
Branch of study : -----
Year of study : -----
6. Do you have a plan of pursuing your higher studies in abroad? Yes /No
7. Are you aware of Common European Framework (CEFR) level? Yes/No
8. Have you attempted /cleared any English Courses such as :BEC/IELTS/TOEFL.

Listening

9. To what extent are you capable of understanding classroom lectures?
 - a) Completely
 - b) Partially
 - c) To some extent
 - d) Very little
10. How often do you use Computer-Based Technologies to enrich your listening skills?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely

Speaking

11. To what extent are you capable to communicate in English inside the classroom?
 - a) Completely
 - b) Partially
 - c) To some extent
 - d) Very little
12. How often do you make use of the technologies to enrich your speaking skills?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely

Reading

13. To what extent are you able to read and comprehend your text books?
 - a) Completely
 - b) Partially
 - c) To some extent
 - d) Very little
14. How often do you attempt to read and understand Internet sources?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely

Writing

15. To what extent are you able to convert the classroom lectures into notes?
 - a) Completely
 - b) Partially
 - c) To some extent
 - d) Very little
16. How often do you use computer for preparing essay/presentation/project typing?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely
17. How confident are you about your proficiency in English?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely
18. How confident are you about your vocabulary?
 - a) Regularly
 - b) Frequently
 - c) Occasionally
 - d) Rarely
19. What extent do the Computer-Based Technologies help you to acquire English language skills?
 - a) Great extent
 - b) Some extent
 - c) Limited extent
 - d) Not applicable
20. To what extent does the English Lab enhance your LSRW Skills?
 - a) Great extent
 - b) Some extent
 - c) Limited extent
 - d) Not applicable

- b) Some extent d) Not applicable
21. How far are you able to follow the online Practice test to enrich your LSRW Skills?
- a) Great extent c) Limited extent
- b) Some extent d) Not applicable
22. What do you think as the advantage of learning through Computer-Based Technologies?
- a) Absence of teachers and fellow students c) Self-learning through repetitive drills
- b) Learning at a convenient pace and time d) Not applicable

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