

Sub-standard teaching material at higher education institutions

by

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English Communication course

- Background (**two universities**).
- Underprepared matriculants.
- High failure rate and dropout rate at HEIs.
- Underperformance of university students due to weak understanding of course content and weak communication skills.

Communication skills

- Communication skills are critical at HEI.
- Conveys lecturer-student understanding of the course content.
- Assessment (**assignments & tests**).
- **Transferable skills** (problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork and effective communication).

Consequences of poor communication skills

- Government average annual investment per higher education student, excluding private contributions in the form of fees = **R18 000** (World Bank 2010).
- Labour market participation (1. Delayed, 2. Under preparedness of new labour market entrants).

Various packages of the English Communication course

- **English for Specific Purposes:** English for Aviation, English for Cabin Crew, English for the Fashion Industry, English for Logistics, English for Engineering, Business English, English for Accounting, English for Tourism, English for Marketing and Advertising, English for the Energy Industry, English for Legal Professionals, English for Medicine Professionals, English for Negotiating, English for Football, English for the Pharmaceutical Industry, etc.

Textbooks

- “the textbook is the only reliable, informed, unthreatening infiltrator of the teacher's classroom” (Jansen, 2012, 2).
- “America's Textbook Fiasco” ... “[t]he public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate and necessary” however, the dynamics of the textbook market includes bad textbooks and the concomitant “Bad Writing’ Problem” (Harriet, 1988, vii).

Basis for ascertaining quality of learning & teaching material

- “Just as there are specific sets of rules governing social behaviours like dressing and eating, there are specific rules governing oral communication. Different speaking styles are appropriate on different occasions, and people generally follow such implicit rules unconsciously. It is highly noticeable when someone breaks the rules, for example when someone addresses us very formally over the telephone. Culture, gender, age and status often determine these rules”
- “To ensure accuracy and completeness, another person should be available to proofread the report, as a second set of eyes often catches errors or omissions that the coordinator missed”.
- “attention to detail indicates a diligent and motivated individual”
- “Ambiguity is fatal to an effective speech”

Textbook A

University A

Generalisations

- “Take a close look at answers that include absolutes such as ‘always’, ‘never’, ‘all’, and ‘none’ – these words often make statements false”.

Generalisations in Textbook A

- “This book ... covers **all** the necessary academic skills and competencies, and provides you with knowledge ...”
- Critical thinking skills “are basic skills that **all** employers expect from employees”
- “your written assignments are the **only** channel of communication between you and your lecturer”

Inappropriate word choice

- “Understanding your thinking and learning **style** ...”
- “Much of the **communicating** you will experience in your everyday lives ...”

Reference style

- “... **only** when you have referenced a source in the text of your essay ... you must provide the full biographical details in a source list at the end of your essay”. [Book A has many errors in this regard – text, bibliography].
- Inconsistency (Badat, 2004: p. 7) vs (Brown, 2009, p. 17).

Spot the difference

- “Study method – this is the process you are going to follow step by step. An example of a study method is the ECT study method: (1) Exploration – getting an overview of the chapter or material by **scan** and **skim** reading, **asking questions** about it and focusing on the content; (2) Consolidation – read critically, **make notes and summaries**, learn the facts; and (3) Testing – recite and recall what you have learnt, write a mock test and revise after 24 hours” (p.9)
- “Study techniques – this refers to all the techniques you can use to read text (**skim**, **scan**, **critical reading**, speed reading), ... **summarise material** ..., ” (p.9)

Inappropriate use of commas and semicolons

- “alternative points, of arguments”.
- “(2) Consolidation – read critically, make notes and summaries, learn the facts; and (3) ...”.
- “It is best to apply the method to small chunks of text; otherwise some of its benefits are lost”.
- “In conclusion, it does not matter what visual image you are reading and interpreting; you need to do more than ‘read’ it”.
- “In order for a **business** to be successful it is essential that it must have a management system capable of ensuring that the **business** can achieve its goals and objectives”.

Repetition

- “reflection (meta-cognition) ... means to look backward to become aware of what you have done correctly, what you have done incorrectly and what you need to do to improve the next time you are in a similar situation” (p.3)
- “Meta-cognition is where you reflect on experience. You think backward ... analyse what you have done wrong and what you have done correctly and know what you should do the next time to improve” (p.8).
- “Then, **actively** read the sentence or paragraph **actively**, and make sure that you have understood its content”

Repetition (cont)

- Time management discussed under ‘Study skills’ (p. 9). Repeated under ‘Study scheduling for examinations’ (p.94).
- “Researching the topic” (p.10) vs “Investigating a topic” (p.83).
- “Examination preparation and examination writing techniques” (p.9). Repeated (p.93 – p.106).
- “Root word – a word that has nothing added at the beginning or the end. It stands on its own as a word, and it has a meaning ... a root word is a word that has nothing added and which forms the basis for other words” (p.18).

Typos

- “taking responsibility for your own learning requires ... looking for learning opportunities and experiences both in and out of the classroom. ... community projects and voluntary and **vocation** work” (p.3).
- “If you’ve done your research, you should have this information **at the ready**”.
- if you are asked to write a paragraph about the **businessperson** you admire, you might write, ‘The **business person** I most admire ...’.
- “setting up **in** small business in an informal settlement poses more challenges than doing so in well-established township”

Hyphens

- “Subheadings” vs “sub-points”
- “well prepared”, “well-prepared”, “well-organised”, “well-informed”, “well-established”
- “special purpose dictionaries” vs “Special-purpose dictionaries”
- “self-evident”, “self appointed”, “self-motivated”

Misfits

- “Some people employ one sense more than the other: sight (visual sense), hearing (auditory sense), **reading/writing**, and other senses such as touching, smelling and tasting” (p.6).
- “You should use your senses in class by listening to the lecturer, **taking notes on what is written on the blackboard and transparencies, reading the textbook ...**” (p.6).

Omissions

- “As is the case with academic texts and textbooks, you will find **that much** easier to read, understand and extract relevant information from journal articles ...”
- “**if is** much longer, you probably have included irrelevant information”
- “You might feel that **you** mind becomes a ‘blank’”

Concord

- “Most **people** can remember the phonics rules they learned as **a child**”
- “If so, what **are** the best **kind** for the audience and the venue?”

Textbook B

University B

Male biased generics

- “Careful attention has to be paid to recraft a number of gender-specific phrases to gender neutral terminology” vs sample letter “We have enjoyed a longstanding contract with your company and in the past have been satisfied with the workmanship provided. Owing to the inconvenience and extra manpower invested as a result of this error, we request 25% discount on the job”

Contradiction

- “Wear a **brighter dress**, shirt or tie than you might normally” vs “Select a suit in a **conservative colour** such as grey, black, navy or brown”
- The book uses black and white printing but with respect to one of the adverts, it says “the model’s bright red and swirling dress”

Various Inconsistencies

- “R2800,00 per month ... R2 800 per month”, “R3 995,00 ... R6 900 ... R8 497,00”
- Different **fonts** are used on p.61, p.64, p.66, p.70, p.72
- Some sample letters have postal codes (p.32-38, p.75) and others do not
- List of bullet points separated by a full stops/commas/semi-colon/nothing
- “You should have compiled a list of **ten or 20** ideas” (p.101)
- “**three** per cent ... **30** per cent ... **52** per cent” (p.137)
- CV sample – “Dates: 2006 ... Dates: 2004-2006 ... Date: 2003-2004” (p.149)

Unsubstantiated and unreferenced statements

- “The writer John Debes used the term ‘visual literacy’ **for the first time** in 1968”
- “Global leaders understand that ... staff working across cultures who have taken a course in multiculturalism are **more successful** than those who have not”

Conclusion

- “Publishers won’t produce better textbooks until selection committees become more discerning and demanding about quality” (Tyson and Woodward, 1989, 14).

Thank you

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