

English for Employability in Indian Colleges: Indispensable need for an appropriate mentor

Tarjani Dakshesh Sheth

Teaching Assistant, ASH Department

C.G.P.I.T. Uka Tarsadiya University

India

Tarjani.sheth@utu.ac.in

Abstract:

English language fluency among graduates is becoming an important competence that they need for employment. The industry has noted the deteriorating level of English among Indian graduates, thus there is a need of strategies and policies to be implemented. English has been an integral part of Indian curriculum for decades and it plays a major role in finding job placements in renowned organizations. Institution and government are accepting that in global perspective, importance of English cannot be ignored. In today's scenario, increasing importance of English language communication skills as a crucial, vital element in deciding ones employability quotient cannot be overstated. It is high time English teachers prepared themselves to play the role of a trainer or facilitator who can build real competencies and skills to bridge the skill gap by focusing on integrated, multi-skill development of the learners, along with enhancement of English Language skills. English being the most dominant, global language of communication, the present paper attempts to draw attention to the ominous need of transformation in the way an English teacher at professional colleges perceive his role in reference to widening employability crises. The aim of this paper is to gauge the present scenario of the industry, role and importance of English in it, and the need for an English teacher to sustain his student's technical talent as well as compete with the world holding two weapons-field related skills and English.

Keywords: Importance of language, English, employability, soft skill, communication skill, teacher's role **Introduction:**

India and English language have become inseparable and English has become a connecting language for educated Indians as people speak different languages in each state of the country. As Graddol perceives: *“In 1700s, English became the official language of administration and many educated Indians learnt the language as it helped them to go up the career ladder. The influence of English grew unabated even after the British left India in 1947. Today, English language plays a vital role in higher education, media and administration of private and government organizations. English has become a powerful agent for change in India”* (Graddol, 2010)[1]. English language education in particular, has a significant role to play in improving jobseekers’ chances on the labour market. Because of the strong discourses that adhere to English as a language of economic development many countries across the world have been moving quickly to try to secure the advantage that English proficiency is supposed to provide. The English language skills areas comprise the abilities of understanding oral and written English and being able to use English orally and in writing adequately in different contexts and for various purposes. It has become an obligatory requirement for a proficient mentor to impart these skills into students to enable them to compete in global arena.

Employability issue for non-English compatible students:

“Employability can be described as ‘a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations’”. It has been found that a number of technically-sound students have not been successful in job interviews just because of their lack of communication skills and there are cases of rank holders in engineering studies who could not go for higher studies to the United States and other English-speaking countries because of their lack of proficiency in English. Just because those students did not get score / band on their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS), they could not make their dream of going to the countries for studies come true. Lack of linguistic aptitude, meagre communicative and personality talents often make it difficult for young graduates to consolidate and express their thoughts commendably and confidently. This affects their prospect of acquisition and retention of employment. A number of engineers employed in IT companies have been sacked because of their poor English communication skills. It is a

question of planning, structuring and integrating various activities for the purpose of enhancing the students' learning.

As Clement and Murugavel observe:

“Many engineering graduates in India are found to be unemployable due to their poor communication skills and lack of confidence. There have been a lot of research papers that have recapped the importance of improving engineering graduates' employability skills; however, the problem of poor communication skills grows unabated in India.” (Clement A.

and T. Murugavel, 2015)[2]

Need for Upright English Educators:

Students who study English as a subject acquire a range of valuable skills, which they can transfer to many different employment situations. Their literary and linguistic training can be used in highly competitive fields. Good English teachers bring all these skills to their places of employment together with sensitivity to literature and language. This makes them good candidates as well as instructors for a wide range of careers. To create awareness about the importance of language skills in job interviews and workplace activities, the English teachers need to provide a lot of information from newspaper articles and websites. As students want to learn more about employability, it has become obligatory for the teachers to read and share facts about language proficiency required by companies. As many students feel less confident about their presentation skills, novel methods of training must be introduced in classes to boost self-confidence. Videos of great speakers and leaders along with structured training sessions will surely equip the engineering graduates to share their views effectively and convincingly. More specifically, care must be taken to encourage students with low selfconfidence and colleges must arrange separate training sessions as weak students may feel inferior in front of their counterparts who are proficient in English language skills.

In teaching ESP (English for specific Purposes) the focus of a teacher should be on developing the students' written language skills within genres such as memos and formal letters, reports (of varying length), writing documentation (as in manuals, procedure and process descriptions), and writing brief articles for journals, magazines and newspapers. Although there are many

varieties of how these documents are set up, conventions and various standards indicate a common lay-out that is widely accepted internationally. Oral presentations, Role Plays and Group discussions in meetings and negotiations are adequate activities for developing the students' oral skills.

As Iqbal and Pratap observe: *“ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. This combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of studies. To create employable graduates for the 21st century is a challenge and it seems to fall on the shoulders of the teaching community”*.

(Pratap,2015) [3]

This is because the employer needs, student needs and institutional needs find their way naturally into the classroom. The new employer requires team players with team spirit. To work in teams is challenging since most of the universities in India fosters competitive and sometimes combative play by the students at examinations and competitions.

Challenges faced:

The first challenge that needs to be recognized is that it is a wider responsibility, not just of a language teacher; teacher of grammar and structure; but of a trainer or a facilitator who can build real competencies to bridge the gap between corporate requirements and institutional assistances. They need to follow a holistic, integrated; skill based, focused, and meticulously planned approach for well-rounded development of the learners. Second, and the crucial problem is the great shortage of eminent teachers trained in language teaching. The low quality of teachers is due to inadequate exposure and opportunity for these teachers to get trained in the finer nuances of English language and English language teaching. The poor compensation given to the teachers is the also a primary reason we do not get enough good youngsters attracted to the profession. The teacher's remuneration needs to be increased by two to three times the current level, if we have to make a difference. Emphasis must be laid on teacher's language skill, overall competency, enthusiasm and professional awareness. The other serious issue is the wrong approach or methods and lack of awareness about the latest developments and trends in the profession. An English teacher should use the right balance of latest trends in both teaching and training techniques in different proportions depending on the need. A teacher of English language, should strive to contribute to transforming young graduates into English language proficient, confident, skilled, and competent professionals. He should be always alert

and focused about the final goal of integrated, multi-skill development of the learners, along with enhancement of English Language skills in the wake of threatening employability crisis.

Clement and Murugavel pointsout that though there have been many conferences and workshops on new methodologies of language teaching, the reality of classrooms present a different picture due to various reasons:

- 1) Lack of training for English professors.
- 2) Students of different levels in the same class.
- 3) Number of students in each class (60 per class).
- 4) Lack of time to complete the prescribed syllabus.
- 5) More importance on written exams (traditional method in India).
- 6) Pressure on teachers to produce high pass percentage in final exams.
- 7) Lack of quality text books.
- 8) Use of workbooks that compile the exercises from previous university question papers.
- 9) Lack of support from college managements.
- 10) English being treated as yet another subject to study.
- 11) Irrelevant syllabus design.
- (12) Lack of relevant methodologies (Clement and Murugavel, 2015)[4]

Propositions:

Teachers can obtain maximum benefits by implementing these prepositions:

- To create awareness about the importance of language skills in job interviews and workplace activities, English teachers need to provide a lot of information from newspaper articles and websites.
- As students want to learn more about employability, it has become obligatory for the teachers to read and share facts about language proficiency required by companies. As many students feel less confident about their presentation skills, novel methods of training must be introduced in classes to boost self-confidence.
- Videos of great speakers and leaders along with structured training sessions will surely equip the engineering graduates to share their views effectively and convincingly.

- Care must be taken to encourage students with low self-confidence and colleges must arrange separate training sessions as weak students may feel inferior in front of their counterparts who are proficient in English language skills.
- Teachers can create experience- sharing opportunities for students to make use of their experience in doing the assignment.
- Teachers must teach oral skills and strategies while preparing students for communication activities.
- Also, it is desirable that teachers rate the difficulty level of oral tasks to suit their students' ability to communicate.
- If easy activities with clear instructions are introduced in the class, students will feel comfortable exercising their skills with ease and the difficulty level can be increased as the students' confidence level enhances.
- Many students' feels that evaluation based on theory papers must be scrapped and students must be continuously assessed on communication activities such as individual presentations and group discussions.

The board of studies, English professors and industry professionals must come together to formulate a syllabus that will suit the current requirements of the industry and a training program for English professors to elevate and amend their focus to English for employability. *"Though many teachers understand the importance of communicative competence, the limitations of classroom reality block them from implementing their ideas"*. (Jihyeon Jeon, 2009).[5]

Conclusion:

There is no single most excellent way of teaching English as it is a foreign language. The successful language teacher will not confine himself to only a single method. A method which is appropriate with one class on one occasion will not necessarily suit to the same class at another time. Likewise, a method which is suitable for one language teacher while teaching a particular language item may not be applicable for other teacher in the same or similar context. There has been a gradual shift from a literature based foreign language to equipping learners with communicative skills for interaction globally. Most English language teachers and more

significantly most teacher trainers adhere to communicative methodology today. Instead, English language teachers should put into practice a great deal of diverse activities to keep themselves up-to-date and enhance their practices to benefit their students according to their need.

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