



ESSENCE OF ENGLISH FOR EMPLOYABILITY (EEE)

Gandhi Babu Shanampoodi

(Assistant Professor of English, Andhra Loyola Institute of Engineering & Technology, Vijayawada)

ABSTRACT



Education is a determining factor that plays a major role in identifying whether a country is moving towards development. In India, one factor that plays a pivotal role, especially in the service industry, is the competency of English, especially the spoken and written skills in facilitating the employability of graduates into both the private and public sectors. However there have been recurring complaints from employers in India, especially in the service sector that business graduates on the threshold of employment lack proficiency in English language skills, especially the spoken skill. Graduates from Central universities in India have proved themselves to be workplace ready in respect of their subject knowledge but, when compared with their counterparts from state universities, are sadly lacking in their English proficiency. This leaves the employers with Hobson's choice in employing graduates from private universities, thereby causing a major social impact in the population which results from unemployment. This paper which could be considered as a review of literature which focuses on the theoretical norms of the employability of graduates provides insights as to how this crucial issue could be better addressed.

Keywords: *Service Industry, Spoken Skills, Employability.*



INTRODUCTION

The need to enhance employability skills and English competency amongst graduates is an ongoing crisis that is being faced by policy makers, employers and graduates alike. Many researches and studies have revealed that there is a serious problem of unemployment amongst graduates due to the lack of English skills and competency. English language is considered as a stepping stone along the pathway for securing employment and English is a means for the acquisition of employment, power and privilege in society. Globalization in the 21st century has interconnected the world in every aspect, whether social, political or cultural, and opened unmatched opportunities in every sphere, and the English language plays an important pivotal role of lingua franca in this uniting process. As such, English is gaining momentum as being recognized as a Global unifying language and a bonding force which is found in a variety of domains. The business world is no exception. The employers have expectations of suitable English skills that graduates should possess upon completion of their course of study at tertiary level in order to narrow down the existing gaps. Most graduates are ill-equipped to face the challenges that lie before them in the competitive and vast job market due to the fact that they lack competence in the English language. This serves as an impediment in securing a job as employers have certain pre-conceived notions of what prospective employees should possess by way of language skills required for gainful employment.

ENGLISH COMBINED WITH SOFT SKILLS

The fact is, while employers are on the lookout for graduates who possess qualities such as leadership skills, computer literacy, confidence and motivation, enthusiasm and initiative, in addition to good academic credentials, they place high priority on graduates who possess good communication and interpersonal skills together with excellent written and spoken English skills, as employees who are able to communicate lucidly with counterparts and customers in English are an asset to any organization. English has been recognized as having an international functional range while accommodating diverse forms of literary activity. English language

should not be thought of as something which has been imposed from outside, but rather, be accepted from within. Indeed in the 21st century, this has surely come to pass, pole-vaulting English into the driving seat on a wave of acceptance, globally, by people of varied linguistic backgrounds and from diverse sections of the world.

THE EFFECT OF ENGLISH ON INDIAN EDUCATION

"..It's not just learning that's important. It's learning what to do with what you learn and learning why you learn things that matters".

-Norton Juster

The goal of the public educational system is to provide learning environments and experiences, at all stages of human development that are humane, just, and designed to promote excellence in order that every individual may be afforded an equal opportunity to develop to his full potential. The university education in India should give priority to developing all aspects of human life. In this scenario, English plays a lead role in today's globalized world as a unifying force for the betterment of international relations between nations. The poor standard of English amongst today's youth in India stems from a political move way back in the 1950s. In 1947, when India gained independence from the British, English was established as the language of the elite and a language that paved the way to acquire power and privilege in society.

English was the medium of instruction in institutions of primary, secondary and tertiary learning in India, as well as being the official language which was used to conduct all government and business transactions. However, a change in political power in 1956 saw the Official Languages Act of 1956 being enacted and this brought about a decline in the status that English had thus far enjoyed in society in India. This was followed by the medium of instruction in schools and universities being converted to regional language and all private schools and universities were absorbed into the education system that came under the purview of the State. This move brought about limitations in occupational mobility and the dominant role that the English language had



played thus far diminished, thereby creating a segment of society, namely the youth, monolingual.

The significant yet negative impact that this political British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences move had on universities is seen even today, where a majority of graduates face an uphill task in securing employment despite their subject knowledge competence, due to the fact that they lack communicative competence in English, and are thereby rejected by employers. In this 21st century, the problem seems to have been compounded due to the fact that, upon rejection by employers as a result of a lack in competency in English, there is an acute problem of unemployment amongst the youth in India who feel inferior at their inability to compete for the available jobs in the market owing to the lack of communication skills in English.

Importance of English in employment - Deccan Herald, highlights the fact that there have been instances where youth who have completed their tertiary education in regional language have been marginalized in employment. However, there are a privileged few in society that have enjoyed an English medium education, having gone through the portals of currently growing international schools and private universities which are affiliated to foreign universities where the medium of instruction is English, and this in turn has caused a division in society based on education, as the chances of this minority securing employment is high.

ENGLISH AS HEART FOR EMPLOYMENT

In today's global world, English can be considered as being the language of the world due to its wide acceptance as being the vehicle of communication that can transcend all barriers, and learning the language and being fluent in it, especially for those on the threshold of employment is a necessity. Being knowledgeable and fluent in English is undoubtedly a powerful tool that can bring about personal as well as global advancement and development. If one is to be competitive and successful in the global market, the ability to speak in English is an imperative. According to The Economists, in today's world, fluency in English has been termed as a basic skill of modern life, and has

been compared to being able to use a computer or drive a car.

Further, the modern trend in the business world is global interactions in the business world and this has acted as a stimulant for proficiency in English communication across borders, thereby making the language a universal tongue. It is not just that Microsoft, Google and Vodafone conduct their business in English; it is the language in which Chinese speak to Brazilians and Germans to Indonesians. Due to the fact that many companies are seeking expansion multi-nationally, English has been elevated to the position of a common corporate language in order to bring about an economic integration and a closer networking in the global business environment. Thus a good English proficiency will undoubtedly open up vistas and pave the way for graduate employability and better equip graduate performance in especially the service sector.

There is a demand for English medium education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in India. The policy proposal for educational reforms put forward by Kothari commission or Indian Education Commission an ad hoc commission set up by government of India. (1964-66) acknowledged the fact that it was vital to build up the English medium education in both State schools and State universities where teaching English requires being well-versed in the four skills, namely, reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, this has encountered problems due to the fact that there is a dearth of trained instructors in English in India and as such, the fundamental problem of increasing the English proficiency remains unsolved. Additionally there are conflicting views amongst experts in the field of English language about which kind of English is more suitable to the Indian society.

The use of Indian English for both writing and speaking is more apt, and that the standard English or British English British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences used by the British, is more important in India. International Standard English is accepted in India as the official written form of the English language, however the English as a Life Skill programme has placed emphasis on the spoken



English skill to promote communication and thereby facilitate employability and enable graduates to gain access to the world of knowledge and technology. Yet, the fact remains that there is problematic situation with regard to the improving of the English proficiency amongst school leavers and undergraduates in India. To compound the situation, some institutions of state education in India, especially management faculties have shifted from the vernacular and adopted English language as the medium of instruction without providing adequate facilities to teach English to undergraduates. This will undoubtedly complicate the already existing problem in that, the performance of undergraduates whose proficiency in English is low, will be seriously affected. It is therefore crucial that a solution to this grave problem which can trigger a series of other difficult situations such as unemployment amongst graduates and the non-acceptance of local graduates into post-graduate programmes in foreign universities due to their lack of competency in English be found before it is too late. The onus therefore is on teachers of English and policy makers to recognize the challenges they are faced with in this rapidly changing scenario and equip themselves to face reality whereby they need to shape syllabi and course content in order that they can contribute to the producing of builders of the nation by enhancing the employability of young graduates. Hence it could be said that English which the role of being a driving force that lunges the graduate forward into gainful employment, is a global language that is a secondary mother tongue to peoples of all nations irrespective of their mother tongue.

The reality is that the companies consider the candidate's ability or inability to speak fluently in English as one of the major selection criterion. The mere domain knowledge won't guarantee one a good job. The situation in most of the companies has changed from a scene where all employees are isolated and would concentrate on their individual performances. Team work for better success is the mantra followed by most companies. So there is no space for individual glory. Employees are expected to be interactive and communicative with others in the team and outside.

As we have multi-cultural and multi-linguistic work force in the companies, English is the language which connects people by default. It is the language used for official communication; whether it is meeting within or outside, presentations, training, conferences, letters, documents, reports etc. The purpose being people are expected to read, write, speak and understand English. On the relationship between education and employment opportunities, the findings revealed that a majority of the respondents who were employers for State, semi State and private sector establishments in India were of the view that communication skills are the most expected skills when deciding if graduates are employable or not. Thus it could be said that, in addition to important skills such as computer skills, experience/training, leadership and decision making skills, team work and interpersonal skills, and problem solving and analytical skills, expected from a British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences graduate to display work-readiness, employers are on the lookout for graduates who possess suitable communication skills in English in order to compete with international business associates.

The responsibility, therefore, of formulating a cohesive and comprehensive curriculum at university level, whereby an all-rounded graduate is nurtured and released into the job market, rests on the shoulders of academics, teachers and administrative authorities of universities in India. Youth empowerment team defines employability as a —multi-faceted characteristic of a person, a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of them, the workforce, the community and the economy. English, which can be considered as an international language and the most dominant language in the world, plays an important role as a tool of communication both locally and globally, having gained the status of being recognized as the global medium for business and communication. English and IT skills are the two key enabling skills, which with harder to define soft skills would enable the delivery to a higher level of quality at scale in order to support India in achieving its ambitions.



Therefore it is vital that today's graduates be well versed in English in order to increase their employment opportunities, be able to use and communicate via the internet, communicate with foreigners, increase their knowledge and travel to other countries and thereby widen their horizons in their future lives and bring empowerment to their lives. Proficiency in English will undoubtedly increase employability by boosting basic skills to get, keep and do well in a job. Thus a wake-up call has been given to stake-holders who wield authority to provide the suitable infrastructure to increase the English skills in graduates in order that the industry and the economy will benefit, and be able to give out as well as receive from both local and international stakeholders pronounced by Honorable Prime Minister in inaugural speech in Pune on the workshop of Good Governance.

It is imperative that measures be taken to close the gap between the language classroom and skills that are crucial for employment, and provide an employability oriented education especially at tertiary level. For this, a needs analysis pertaining to competency in English must be conducted in order to ascertain the requirements of the industry, and this information must be brought into the classroom and made known to both teachers and students. This requires the close working between employers and institutions of tertiary education in order that the gap in respect of a lack of English competency be bridged. Creating a learner-centered classroom atmosphere coupled with the needs of the industry, and thereby implementing a holistic integrated approach to teaching English at tertiary level, will, over time, facilitate the linking together of a variety of aspects concerning the enhancing of English language competency amongst graduates and undoubtedly bring about a solution to this increasing problem of unemployment.

Additionally, focusing on the final goal of producing an employable graduate will ease the burden placed on employers to train their staff in English, with the additional benefit that these graduates will be an asset to their employers and, at a personal level, be able to forge ahead with their career advancement. Today, more graduates are

aware of the crucial role that English plays in helping them be gainfully employed and it is essential that teachers of English and policy makers thrive on this positive attitude to meet the needs of both the employer and the graduate. Regardless of their social background, graduates have come to the realization that, without being competent in English, they will not be able to find suitable employment. English has thus been accepted as being a vehicle that will bring about change in the lives of graduates.

The language is also gaining a strong position in institutions of tertiary education in Sri Lanka as being essential to perform better in higher studies and to secure suitable employment. It is therefore the need of the hour that teachers of English at tertiary level, strive against all odds to transform young British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences ISSN: 2046-9578 143 graduates into professionals who are competent, confident, skilled and proficient in the English language. Conclusion Players in the team of employability of graduates need to work together towards a common goal – organizing the various team-members to play their part with the ultimate aim of achieving the goal set before them. Having identified the English proficiency problem well in advance, all the team members comprising students, employers, university authorities, teachers of language teaching and curriculum designers need to come together, to address the problems at hand and find lasting solutions that will benefit all parties concerned and the economy of India. Having identified the needs analysis of the industry, focusing towards achieving these targets will undoubtedly see a rise in the performance if industries both locally and globally and bring down the graduate unemployment statistics in India.

The present trend among all stakeholders is that the English language ranks high at universities, as the importance of a good English proficiency to secure a respectable job and achieve greater opportunities in higher studies, has been highlighted. Learning a lesson from the past, India needs to forge ahead with plans to improve the English competency amongst graduates, thereby minimizing the chances of produced disgruntled graduates who are



unemployable and dissatisfied employers who are unable to contribute to the growth and progress of the nation.

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