

Soft Skills are Employability Skills; With Special Reference to Communication Skills.

“To be employed is to be at risk; to be employable is to be secure.”

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Abstract: *To be employable is to have employability Skills. Employability Skills are Soft Skills. Soft skills complement Hard Skills. Embedding the training of soft skills into hard skills courses is an effective and efficient method of achieving both an attractive way of teaching a particular content and an enhancement of soft skills. Soft skills fulfill an important role in shaping an individual’s personality. It is therefore important that students acquire skills beyond academic or technical knowledge.*

I. Introduction

Employers complain about a lack of soft skills among graduates from educational institutions. Predominantly missed are Communication Skills, which ranks high on the list of “Missing Skills,” for graduates to enter the corporate world. Most of the graduates are academically proficient but lack soft skills such as Verbal Skills, Numerical Reasoning and Team working. The German Engineering Association recommended that at least 20% of engineering curricula should have soft skills.

II. What exactly are soft skills?

Soft skills refer to a cluster of personality traits, social graces, and facility with language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark people to varying degree. Soft Skills complement hard skills which are the technical requirement of a job. (Wikipedia, 2007).

Soft skills required for employability include communication skills, critical and structural thinking, team working capability, self-management, time management, cultural awareness, common knowledge, creativity, responsibility, integrity, work ethic, negotiating skills and social etiquette.

The personality traits employers look for in their prospective employees are

- Personal qualities
- Interpersonal Skills (including language skills)
- Additional subject knowledge.
- Collateral thinking

III. What the most important soft skills?

The one property that comes to most people’s mind when soft skills are mentioned is: communication skills. And it is indeed the talent which is lacking among graduates from colleges and universities. Communication skills include a lot of different aspects like,



Carter wants language learning and teaching to start from scratch (i.e.,) acknowledge insight into the new view. The minimum requirement for a university graduate should be ample proficiency in spoken and written form, correct body language that will be reflected in conversation skills, discussion and presentation that can market oneself and one’s ideas. Good social skills are reflected at the working place. One may have the

“hard skills” of knowing what usage is correct and what is incorrect but lack the soft skill to present it at the right time.

IV. Communication-what does it mean?

A person who is able to organize and express ideas concisely in both written and speaking; two way communication through sharing information, listens to and understands others, speaks clearly and directly to individuals and groups.

Adequate communication skills are a pre-requisite for a range of other soft skills like moderating discussions or conflict management. A German proverb states: “Self-recognition is the first step towards improvement.” As soon as the deficit has been identified, one can start working on how to overcome it. The key lies in recognizing it accepting the shortfall and undergoing simple self-training or guided training for its elimination. For example shyness or introverted character can be overcome by ‘small talk’. Small talk is an important part of communication skills. Many people are not fond of ‘small talk’. The person lacking the skill can make it a habit at parties or social gatherings to initiate a conversation with strangers. One can easily venture on topics like weather, cinema, education etc., however controversial topics such as politics, religion, region are better avoided. While the first timers might require some effort, it would become a habit after a few months. With such and similar topics even an introverted person can appear reasonably social. The only prerequisite is that one must acknowledge one’s weakness and take the decision to change it.

One straight forward reason is today’s job market is becoming increasingly competitive and to survive in this tough environment candidates have to bring along that ‘competitive edge’ that distinguishes them from other candidates with similar qualification. Candidates get this ‘competitive edge’ from sound communication skills, which adds to additional knowledge and convincing skills.

Being adaptable about learning new skills can contribute to the learning community- in class, on the job, solo, in groups. Passion for continual learning and self improvement is the key to success. They seek every opportunity for learning outside, participating in professional and developmental activity and coaching activities.

These skills can be developed through written projects, research and reports, class presentation, classroom discussions, employment and volunteering and through attending conferences and events.

Employers prefer to take in graduates who can put in two or three sentences together, who can chat in a pleasant manner with colleagues and customers and those who can do a proper presentation- these are the candidates who will be productive from a very early age and those who have that ‘competitive edge’. Therefore candidates with good communication skills are invaluable, quick and successful starters. They can even serve to cover up weaknesses on the hard skills side. Though the fact remains that Technical skills cannot be substituted for communication skills.

Good hard skills alone are not necessarily enough to be in the first choice when it comes to promotion. The success stories of people who have mastered communication skills still top the list. Employers prefer to promote staff members with superior soft skills like communication skills, honesty, flexibility and common sense. The matured, well balanced personality of a person is exhibited in soft skills, not hard skills. An introverted ‘good’ technician is no longer appreciated. Soft skills play an important role in shaping a person’s personality and social competence. Soft skills stand with equal importance beside hard skills.

V. Where can one acquire the required skills?

Acquiring communication skills can be done by self training or by enrolling for formal training. E-learning has become increasingly popular. A pleasant way of self-training is with frequent socializing with friends. ‘Socializing consciously’ (i.e.,) with the purpose in mind to enhance our skills. Communication skills can be practiced while chatting, discussing, listening and reading.

Be aware of what your body is saying: Body language can say much more than a mouthful of words. Whether you are listening or speaking, looking into the eyes of the person with whom you are conversing can make the interaction more successful. Often communication can be stopped before it starts by body language that tells people you don’t want to talk.

Animate your voice: Avoid a monotone. If the pitch doesn’t raise and fall an otherwise interesting lecture would also appear boring. Radio DJs are a good example of this. As a young professional in today’s global business world, it is imperative that you are competent in both oral and written communication. It is also necessary to build interpersonal relationships, giving presentations and for debating viewpoints effectively. You need to master the skill for both in-person as well as over-the-phone interactions.

Improve pronunciation and diction: To spruce up your pronunciation skills watch news shows on channels like CNN and BBC. Sing English songs out aloud. Pretend you are a newscaster and read out the newspaper in your mirror. Focusing on elongated vowels will help you slow down your speech. Make sure that ‘air’ comes out of your mouth when saying the letters ‘T, P, K’ and the sound ‘Ch’. Making an effort to speak to family and

friends in English can help considerably. Listen to the correct pronunciation on-line and try using those words at least five times, this will ensure that the word is recorded in your memory.

Also make it a habit to read National newspaper and well-written magazines like The Economist and India Today. In terms of books, read what interests you. Some good writers whose language is easy to follow include Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahari, Paulo Coelho, JD Salinger, Albert Camus and Roald Dahl.

VI. What can the lecturers do to enhance communication skills?

Student centered approach: The first step is to create awareness about the 'Importance of communication skills,' and an approach to enhance them by applying methods such as dedicated reading – to broaden their horizon. Communication skills should be incorporated into their curricula. Today's curriculum is overloaded with hard skills courses and makes it impossible to add courses. In such cases training to students should be embedded into the teaching methodology.

An increase in Group Discussion, letting students do Oral Presentations can be introduced into the core curriculum. Such an approach will automatically increase the effectiveness, which will also prove to be a valuable skill in many work situations.

When venturing on a new topic, teachers might start with a brain storming and elicit what students already know. This gives the students a sense of familiarity; then any accompanying material will not be taken as a forced medicine but as one of the many possible options. Students could also be asked to write upon notice boards, flipcharts- depending on the size of the classroom. Involve the students in tasks, encouraging them to set-up their individual learning strategies. Teacher talking time should be reduced and student participation time ought to be increased. Tasks should be suitable to work in pairs or groups, tend to be open rather than closed and should permit a variety of possible answers. You need competence and experience to do this job; above all you need enthusiasm, commitment and patience to do this job well.

In times of boundless globalization, English is immensely hospitable to new words, idioms and slang. Therefore activities based on vocabulary building should be an integral part of teaching.

Grooming students: Grooming students, making them future ready and instilling in them those attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and succeed in their chosen area of passion are employability skills. Employers want genuine team players who are self-motivated, who have positive 'can do' attitude, willingness to learn, honest, flexible and those with excellent communication skills.

Global demand for graduated who can adapt to change, fit into an organization quickly, self-manage to learn and develop within their teams is rising. The ability to positively influence someone is vital to make one a good team player. One should be able to build rapport and relations quickly and should be able to adapt to new situations. One should be aware of one's strengths and challenges. Inter personal skills such as emotional maturity, leadership or responsibility is difficult to quantify contrast to hard skills. They can only be exhibited therefore they are crucial and increasingly important in today's business scenario. Therefore the willingness to learn, embrace new ideas, conflict handling, self-assessment, self-discipline have set the bench mark, are marked as 'hot' buzz words and a pre-requisite for employable graduates.

Apart from communication skills, collateral learning is the key word; that is the notion of a learner learning more than just the subject that he /she is studying at a given time. Attitude awareness and problem solving are what count in the future; therefore teaching should ideally have a major share in attitude formation. 'Students learn best from what their teachers enjoy teaching'

VII. Conclusion:

Employers recruit outstanding, motivated individuals- people with enthusiasm, have the courage to lead, have values, skills, strong analytical and conceptual abilities and individuals passionate about learning. Teaching interpersonal skills is not about making yourself powerful; it is about making your students powerful. English is not only the language of business and international politics; it is the language of sports, travel, computer software and the only language that connects us globally.

Phraseology, lexis and collocations are of primary importance in this approach of which grammar is no longer the be-all and end-all. If twenty years students learned the conventions of business writing through letters and telexes, this is now changed to faxes and e-mails. Teachers should teach students to use reasoning and evidence. They should be encouraged to think about old problems in a new way and re-think ideas that haven't been questioned earlier. Future engineers and architects will sit next to economists and IT specialists. Thus teachers should give assignments which allow innovation for all groups.

Good English teachers will always be diligent learners. There is always scope for innovations and improvement to enhance linguistic competence. This will prepare the learners for the extra-linguistic demands of handling language aptly through soft skills and will undoubtedly put them in their careers.