



## Enhancing Employability through Developing English Language Skills

### Abstract

*An important function of education is to develop employable individuals. However, education without imparting skills will certainly make one crippled. Skilled workforce is an important ingredient of economic growth and development of any country. India is aggressively heading on the path of development and to be participative in it we need to have skilled human resource. Various surveys have reported that India needs a huge supply of people who are skilled enough to be employable. An individual finds it difficult to be suitably employed due to lack of right skills and competencies. The statistics show that huge numbers of graduates are not employable because they lack competency in English. English as we are aware of has become global language of communication, and is a prerequisite in various spheres such as communication, education, science, technology, business etc. There has been consistent increase in the demand for English skills in the world of work. Thus communicative competence in English becomes vital in deciding employability of an individual. The present paper therefore is an attempt to bring forward the interrelationship between English skills and employability. English language teaching needs to be revamped and focus should be on language skills enhancement. The paper attempts to put forward the suggestive measures to develop communicative competence in English language for the changing demands of employability.*

**Keywords:** Employability, English Skills, Competence

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#### Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in the development of the society by providing skilled workforce. It is a medium to acquire knowledge and skill which opens up opportunities for individuals. It would not be wrong to say that development and employable human resource is synonymous to each other. When we talk about employability it is directly related to skill. A skilled individual is easily and suitably employable and is able to give his/her best in the process of development. Thus if we want an economy to develop we need to focus on acquisition of relevant skills. There is a great need for equipping the workforce for employability with the skills which are needed today so as to enable them to be participative in the development process. It is also very important to prepare individuals with the skills which will be in demand in future so as to ensure their employability in future.

One such skill is communication competence which helps an individual to convey thoughts, ideas, information, feeling etc. It is a core skill which plays a vital role in preparing one for employability. Effective communication is a fundamental requirement for being employable. It is essential to unlock the doors of opportunities. Communicating in English becomes further more important from the perspective of employability. Nagarajan (2014) has reported that people who are able to communicate in English are able to earn up to 34% more than those who are not able to do so. This indicates that there is a link between employability and communicative competence in English. A survey report of British Council (2014) indicates skills gaps in various areas, with English featuring as an essential skill to complement core domain skills in various sectors. It further makes a mention of National Vocational Education Qualification Framework vision document (AICTE- NVEQF Vision Document, 2011), views that many

policy-making bodies view English as a key skill that can transform the employability of India's youth. India's Planning Commission's Approach Paper to 12th Plan also states that, "Special emphasis on verbal and written communication skills, especially in English would go a long way in improving the employability of the large and growing mass of disempowered youth." The paper is an attempt to stress upon the need of English language competency for employability and the measures to be taken up for enhancing this skill in individuals.

### **Importance of communicative competence in english**

English was introduced in India due to the colonial rule and gradually got the status of official language. Even though it has been a part of Indian education for decades, English language competency has been lacking among individuals. The National Skill Qualification Framework (NSFQ) defines Competence as the proven ability to use acquired knowledge, skills and personal and social abilities, in discharge of the responsibility roles. It is the ability to do a job well.

English language in India has a prominent place in the world of education, administration, science, technology, judiciary, industries etc. Therefore it becomes a necessity to be conversant with the language if one wants to be suitably employable. It helps in smooth transition to higher education, social mobility and better job opportunity. To have communicative competence, LSRW (listening, speaking, reading and writing) skills need to be sharpened. Verbal communication competency enables one to express the ideas with clarity in speech and written communication competency helps to express one clearly in writing. These are considered as core skills.

Today's is a global world and individuals keep travelling across borders for work. Working knowledge of English clears a big hurdle in this process as English undoubtedly has become a world language. A recent report by UN (United Nations) makes a mention that 16 million Indians are scattered across the globe making it the largest number of migrants. Thus, English language competency opens up the doors of world of work not only nationally but also internationally.

The fact that English language skills enhance an individual's prospect of employability cannot be negated. It has been found that English language skills give significant returns in India. Lack of this skill contributes to skill gap.

### **Inept English language: an impediment for employability**

Life without communication can be dull and cannot be even thought of. An effective communicator always has an edge over others. Communicative competence becomes even more important when it is looked upon as a skill and is an essential criterion for employability. English language proficiency is an important skill in demand among employers. Lack of English language skills is one reason for the skill gap in India. Some alarming facts related to the employability of youth in India due to lack of communicative skill in English language are mentioned below:

- \* A survey by Wheebox Employability Skills Test (WEST) in 2014 revealed that only 34% of Indian graduates are employable.
- \* An article published in The Wall Street Journal says, "So few of the high school and college graduates who come through the door can communicate effectively in English and so many lack a grasp of educational basics such as reading comprehension, that just three out of every 100 applicants can be hired by a call center company".
- \* A research article by Aspiring Minds states that 32% management graduates are not able to grab a job opportunity because of lack of English and Cognitive skills. For students in tier II and tier III cities, a large gap is observed in English language skills.

- \* National daily, The Hindu reported a survey which included 60,000 students from colleges across India. It stated “for an analyst’s role, Ninety per cent graduates did not have required proficiency in English communication”.

Competence in English is in great demand today in the world of work and performance in English is considered as recruitment criteria by many employers in public and private sectors. India’s leading online talent assessment company, Wheebox while conducting corporate job survey, questioned the employers about the single most important thing they want in their prospective employees. They were given options like Integrity and values, domain knowledge, result orientation etc. When questioned about this, 6% voted for English Communication Skills.

### **Strides towards skilling India**

The Indian government has realized the need of the hour and has taken the initiatives in this direction so as to meet the increasing demands of the skilled labour force. As a step in this direction, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was launched in 2008-09 to cater to the growing need of skilled workforce in various sectors in India. The government of India went on to establish a Department of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship which became a full-fledged Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in November 2014. Since its establishment the department has started working in the direction of skilling and came up with National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and National Skill Development Mission. Under the same the government has also come up with Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) which is an outcome-based skill training scheme. These steps taken to ensure skilling at scale and speed with high quality outcomes reflects that the government is serious towards this mission.

### **The recommendations**

India has a massive workforce which needs to be skilled appropriately so as to make them employable. English skills along with vocational and technical training play a vital role in making one employable. It is a well-known fact that English language has been in growing demand and in future it is only going to spread its wings further in the world of work. Language skills cannot be acquired in a definite short span of time and calls for persistent efforts. It is thus recommended that an early intervention in English language competency be made so as to make an individual fit for employability.

Enhanced English language skills will enable an individual in exploiting their capabilities to the fullest. An individual who has enough knowledge and skills related to a particular sector, many a times lags behind only because of the lack of the required competency in English language. Thus an improved communicative competence in English enables individuals in being employable.

There is an immediate need to address the problem of skill gap related to English skills. The paper recommends the following measures through which the unemployable workforce due to lack of competency in English language, can be made competent enough:

#### **➤ Foundation Steps**

Basic education is the foundation of a prosperous nation. An educated mass plays an important role in the development of an economy. For an employable population it needs to be ensured that every child should have an access to education. Children should be in the school and not at work. It is evident that an educated individual has more opportunities of employability over an uneducated one. Mehtabul Azam, Aimee Chin, Nishith Prakash (2010), report that there is a positive relationship between education and English ability. Thus if we want to do away with the skill gap the first step towards it would be to see to it that every child goes to school.

### ➤ **Skill Based School Education**

School education is the basis of development of a society and lays down the foundation for employability. English skills if are addressed to at the school level itself can be of great help to the students who are getting ready for the job market. English rather than being taught as a subject should be looked upon as a skill enhancement opportunity. It's not difficult a task that students who already have English introduced as a subject at school itself at primary, upper primary and secondary levels be given enough opportunities to enhance the communicative competence in English language. This will make them have some core skill which is necessary for being employable. There should be a bridge between the school education and higher education as well as school education and the world of work. The students at the school should be well prepared in school itself for further learning and employability.

### ➤ **Developing Language Competency at Higher Education**

When the students enter into higher education or any other area specific technical education, the already acquired communicative competence needs only some kind of honing in the language relevant to that particular sector. This systematic way of developing communicative competence in English language will help in curbing any extra cost to be incurred on the developing these skills and also will save time. There should be emphasis on developing language ability of students at higher education institutions by working on the gaps due to lack of enough exposure to English language at school. Bridge courses should be introduced at tertiary level to overcome the gap of English language competency. Empowering individuals with essential skills will help in smooth transition from college to work. Thus students will be saved from wasting their time and money in developing English language skills.

### ➤ **Seriousness towards English Language**

The education system in the country is undergoing radical changes with regard to the employability of the students. Various institutions of higher education in India have English as medium of instruction. But how the language lessons are transacted needs some retrospection. Though different courses have English as a subject according to the need of the course, students on the completion of the courses do not have enough hold on the language. The result is that even after having required qualification, the students are not employable due to language incompetency. English language teaching learning needs to be given enough emphasis like other subjects and emphasis needs to on developing language competency. The focus of English teaching should be on skills sharpening and not syllabus completion and scoring.

### ➤ **Waking up to Call and Providing Access**

There is not enough awareness about the acquisition of English language skills and its benefits in getting employable. Its only when this becomes a hassle in finding suitable employment that people start hunting for acquiring these skills. In this case enough opportunities should be available to them to develop these skills. Such skills should also be available at an affordable cost. The employers can also provide training sessions on developing English language ability to the new entrants.

### ➤ **Enrichment During Professional courses**

The demand for skilled workers rather than qualified ones is stressed upon, today. It is evident from the statistics that many professionals don't get employed only because they lack English language skill. This aspect needs to be understood and enough emphasis needs to be given to develop the language competency in English in students while they are undergoing professional training.

### ➤ Working on Future Needs

Anticipating the future and acting proactively always pays good returns. Same applies to skilling the workforce. If the workforce is skilled in advance for the rising needs of the future it will help in filling in the skill gap. English language skills required in future, needs to be developed in people so that there doesn't arise the need of any breach courses at higher education level or training sessions while joining a job focussing on English language competencies.

### ➤ English Language Skill Test

There is a need for Indianised version of an English proficiency test. If there is a standard test and the scores are acceptable across the industry, it will give a framework for the general English language competency requirement in the world of work. It will facilitate in developing English curriculum at school and tertiary level to suffice the English skills for employability. This will also give a direction to English language teaching (ELT) in India.

### Conclusion

Inculcating skills for being employable is an important aspect of being educated and getting ready for the job market. To prosper and keep pace with the growing demand of employable workforce we need to equip the workforce with the skills required for the available job opportunities. There is a growing demand of the skilled workforce in today's world and education emphasising skill development can cater to this demand. Education is the foundation of a progressing nation and equips one with the essential knowledge and skill to stay updated. There should be a link between the education being provided in the school and at higher education institutions to the world of work. English should be taught with emphasis on developing the skills of the language. Communication skills in English language are significant in providing employability. It is found that there exists a positive association between English language skills and earnings in India. These skills need to be focussed at an early stage so that by the time an individual is ready to move to work he/she is competent enough in the language.

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