THE ROLE OF PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH AND SOFT SKILLS FOR COMMERCE STUDENTS FOR EMPLOYABILITY: A THEORITICAL CONSTRUCT

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ABSTRACT

Today in India, undergraduate students are privileged as campus interviews are conducted every year to select candidates for jobs in reputed colleges. Nevertheless, to say meritorious students have a bright opportunity for campus placement. More importantly students of commerce stream with good Communicative Skills in English and efficiency in soft skills can enter the corporate world, IT companies and banks through campus placements. Good Communicative skills and efficacy in soft skills also help the commerce students to excel in higher studies such as M.Com and MBA. However many students are deprived of campus placements as they lack good communicative skills in English and as they are not well equipped in soft skills. This paper aims to analyze the role of good communicative skills in English and the importance of acquiring soft skills and to focus on the methods to attain them.

Keywords: Communicative Skills in English, Soft Skills, Corporate World, Campus selection, Post Graduation.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of every student is to attain a good job with considerably good salary. Some decades ago, Campus interviews were conducted only in professional colleges. But today in India the scenario has completely changed. The undergraduate students are also privileged to attend campus interviews as campus placements take place every year in many of the reputed colleges. The students in commerce stream have an opportunity to enter banks, IT companies and corporate world if they are proficient in English and soft skills. Moreover a commerce graduate has a scope of pursuing M.Com as well as MBA to be more qualified for employability. Good communication skill in English and proficiency in soft skills are the most required criteria for excelling in the academic performances while pursuing the above mentioned post-graduate courses. Are all students who graduate with considerably good percentage of marks well placed? The answer is definitely ‘No’. Where does the problem lie? What measures can be taken to provide solution to this problem? When we focus on this area we understand that communication skill in English has been identified as one of the prime setbacks of undergraduates of India in finding jobs. It is also true that lack of soft skills is yet another drawback hindering employability. A theoretical analysis of this problem is essential to find a solution to this problem.
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
- To understand the concept of Soft Skills and its benefits
- To bring out the reasons for the inefficiency of the students in Soft Skills and Communication Skills
- To suggest some measures to enhance the efficiency of students in Soft Skills and Communication Skills

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This paper is descriptive in nature. Secondary sources have been obtained through books, journals, internet source and newspaper to compile this article. Researcher has also consulted senior research guides.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. How does proficiency in English and soft skills help the students at undergraduate level?
2. Why do many students in undergraduate level lack good communicative skills and soft skills?
3. How can colleges improve the communication skills and soft skills of the students?
4. What effort the students can individually put to equip themselves for employability?

PROBLEM STATEMENT
Many meritorious students fail to get selected in campus interviews at undergraduate level as they lack proficiency in English and Soft Skills. An analysis of this problem may provide a solution to this problem and be an eye opener to the students who have great aspiration. This article will be an eye opener to the commerce students at the undergraduate level. This article may help the undergraduate students to plan for acquiring proficiency in English and efficacy in Soft Skills within the three years tenure at the undergraduate level.

LITERATURE REVIEW
S. Mangala Ethaiya Rani (2010) explains that Soft skills are learned behaviors which require training and focused application. Soft skills will enable students with a strong conceptual and practical framework to build, develop and manage teams. They play an important role in the development of the students’ overall personality, thereby enhancing their career prospects.

Dr. Jessy John(2015) opines that the education as well as the market scenario is changing very fast. A decade ago, those individuals who had a brilliant academic record with added work experience were well sought after by most of the corporate institutions. But today hard skills and experience are not sufficient enough for the ingress and escalation in the corporate world. Employers prefer to hire and promote those persons who are resourceful, ethical, and self directed with good communication/soft skills. Dearth of soft skills in the candidates has resulted in low hiring by corporate.

Bernd Schulz (2008) gives a valid suggestion to acquire soft skills which is as follows:
Where can soft skills be acquired?
One way is enrolling for formal training, e.g. taking evening classes on Rhetoric, languages, presentation skills, conflict or cultural management. This is a well-proven concept with the advantage of having some kind of certificate at the end of the course, which might come in handy for job applications. The other way of acquiring soft skills we looked at is self-training, usually based on books. As we saw earlier, changing of personal traits often requires long-term practice and therefore self-training might be more useful regarding the improvement of this category of soft skills. Additionally, during the last decade another method of self-training has become increasingly popular: Electronic Learning usually abbreviated to e-learning.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
English is widely perceived in India as a valuable life and employability skill. According to David Crystal, English is the language ‘on which the sun never sets’. The fields of science and technology, industry and commerce, travel, entertainment and globalization in different walks of human life have quickened the spread and use of English. Indians follow the norms of western countries in many ways. Today we see that the norms which are followed by many companies in recruiting candidates for various jobs are also westernized. Say for example the dress code to be followed in the corporate world is just the replica of the western culture. So much to say fluency in English language becomes very important to assure a good job. In the corporate field, English becomes very important that every other transactions and negotiations are mainly done in English. On the other hand good soft skills also become very essential for the overall growth in one’s career.

What does a soft skill mean?
Soft skills involve an individual’s emotional intelligence quotient and it is subtle to define this term. Soft skills can be explained with an example. While delivering a speech or a lecture soft skill plays an important role. Mere speaking will not make a lecture effective. It should be delivered in such a manner that the speaker communicates effectively to the audience so that the listener understands clearly the message conveyed. The speaker should have a good eye contact with the listener, and also possess good language. He should vary his tone wherever necessary and modulate his voice according to the context. He should be presentable and should add humor in his speech whenever necessary. To be precise eye contact, voice modulation, body language etc. are the components of the soft skills in this context. Hence we can say that Soft Skills involves Communication Skills, Healthy personality traits, Good language, Positive attitude, and a Friendly approach. The following chart gives a clear picture of what Soft Skills means:
How does proficiency in English and soft skills help the students at undergraduate level?
The employers while selecting a candidate for a job would like to find out whether he is competent to face any situation specifically a stressful situation or whether he is efficient to perform his job without any hazards. For this purpose the soft skills and the communication skills of the candidate are tested. Excellence in soft skills, proficiency in English and good performance in academic subjects are the essential criteria for campus placement. If a candidate proves to be good in these parameters he has good chance to get a good job. Even in the workplace, these two factors help us to attain a good position. To test the proficiency in English normally in campus selection process Aptitude test, GD (Group Discussion) round and Oral interview are conducted. Corporate world demands good communication skills in English and proficiency in soft skills such as negotiation skills, presentation skills, creativity enhancing and event management.

Today we see that there is a great demand for B.Com course. B.Com students have different avenues to build up their career. They can get into banks, corporate world, IT companies or they can pursue post –graduation such has M.Com or MBA. How does English play an important role in career development? As mentioned earlier proficiency in English is one of the main testing elements for campus interviews. Secondly if a student wants to excel in any job, proficiency in English as well as efficacy in soft skills play a very important role. Say for example in banks and in companies to promote any product, an employee has to do presentation on it in various places. Fluency in English and good negotiation skills should go hand in hand. This is very essential in corporate sectors, call centers, BPO sectors etc.

M.Com or M.BA courses are gateway for big companies as well as for teaching profession. To qualify in the entrance exam for M.BA English is very essential. English is one of the papers in CAT and MAT entrance exams. Comprehension passages, Vocabulary, Correction of errors in sentences, Re-arranging the jumbled sentences etc are the areas of testing in these entrance exams. While pursuing M.BA presentation skill plays a very important role. Intelligence alone does not assure good job opportunities. Intelligence and being equipped in Soft skills as per the market requirements are very essential to attain success.

Why do many students in undergraduate level lack good communicative skills and soft skills?
Even though most of the students score good marks and excel in extra -curricular and co-curricular activities they lack confidence to speak in English as most of them have done their primary school studies in a vernacular medium school. Most of them have parents who are poor and uneducated. When they get into the UG level they lack confidence to speak in English and they do not have any training in soft skills. Due to time constraints the teachers in the colleges are not successful to give vigorous training to such students to improve their proficiency in English and soft skills. The other impediments which disarm the students to become fully equipped in soft skills are as follows:
1) Class room strength exceeds above 60 and sometimes up to 90 per class
2) All teachers are not well trained to train the students in Communication Skills and Soft Skills
3) In the Semester system, time is sufficient only to complete the prescribed syllabus.
4) Students give more priority to the core subjects than to extra coaching classes for English and development of Soft Skills
5) Soft Skills is not a part of the curriculum

Do the colleges in India provide enough training to the students that they become well equipped and employable when they finish their graduation? If the answer is yes why are most of the graduates unemployed? According to the Market Consulting Report published by I Value Consulting Private Limited, A company that focuses on assessing student employability, after having surveyed 55,000 students in 2011 found that not even 3% were employable directly without further training by information technology (IT) companies. They also said that about 78% of those surveyed struggled in the English language.
What measures can colleges take to enhance communicative skills and soft skills in students?

- Bridge courses can be conducted on basic grammar at the entry level of the degree courses.
- Certificate course on Personality development can be conducted
- Certificate course on Spoken English can be conducted
- Certificate course on Event Management can be conducted.
- Certificate course on Power Point Presentations can be conducted
- Training for Communicative Skills and Soft Skills may be outsourced
- Incorporate Soft Skills training in the curriculum of management courses.

Can the colleges tackle this problem alone? Or should they take external support for the same? There are many private institutions and organizations that provide Training programs in the field of English and soft skills. There are a significant number of domestic and international organizations established in the English Language Training market. It is ideal to outsource the training programs required to equip students for employability.

CONCLUSION

Undergraduate students are faced with challenging and demanding recruitment process in which they have to prove their mettle with English communication skills. Besides being good at English, they need to be aware of the employability skills required at their future workplaces. The ability to listen, question and express opinions and ideas properly and produce written work that is lucid, clear and structured using correct spelling and grammar has become mandatory for every student (The UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009) who aspires to get a lucrative job. In addition, they require exemplary English skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing to go up the career ladder. The big question is whether the undergraduate students are aptly trained in their colleges to face the challenges. If students’ are given a right direction they will very quickly attain success in their career.

The following steps should be kept in mind to attain the desired goals:

- Students should expose themselves to English Language in every possible way.
- Students should set a goal at the entry of the undergraduate degree course itself that he is going make sure that he will work hard to be fully equipped in soft skills and communicative skills in English.
- Providing extra training in colleges to increase the aptitude of the students in personality development and skills in good communication is an ideal solution.
- Colleges may outsource ELT programmes and Soft Skills training programmes where the quality of the training is assured.
- Students should find different sources to get trained in soft skills and communicative skills during the three years of their degree course which is the prime period of their life time.

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. On the other hand the effort of each and every student to improve their proficiency in English and efficacy can play wonders in their career.

The links mentioned below can be used by students for self-study and this may lead to more insights. The following links can be used by students for self-study and this may lead to more insights.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OThdLMQ7lyA
- How to Improve Communication to Get Job Ready | Communication Tips | TalentSprint
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKwm55UnouY
- 3 Steps to Introduce Yourself in an Interview | Interview Tips | TalentSprint
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdgUBlfVsE Interview Question: Tell Me Something About Yourself? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_w9gRRbC6s
- Simple Trick to Become Fluent in English - the JAM Technique - How to Be a Confident Speaker. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Qb4K-wtk
- How to speak English fluently and confidently https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuYgJN-jD9I
- Introduction - Developing Soft Skills and Personality - Prof. T. Ravichandran, IIT Kanpur , National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIPi4KMArQ&list=PL0bRA68fC51pm5hEuNL0_eWN3eI-S1y

Every student should realize that hard work and determination to reach our goals can bring a sea change in our career and it is a road to our success.

REFERENCES


• English Language Training Market India Market Opportunity Report [link](https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/draft_elt_report_24_dec.pdf)


• [Link](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/ecommerce-companies-startups-lining-up-offers-at-b-schools/articleshow/62667761.cms)

• [Link](http://www.hratbudas.com/index.php/en/softskills)