

ENHANCING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES- A CASE FOR A RELOOK AT THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

One recent survey conducted about the reasons for the unemployability of Indian graduates reveals that 90% of the graduates in India lack good communication skills, which ultimately results in their poor performance in interviews. This paper looks into the various factors for this- the main factor being an unsuitable syllabus for English at the school and undergraduate levels. The other reason is that some teachers of English who are themselves, poor models of spoken English, teach communication skills. Yet another reason is that students lack constant practice in speaking English, as not many peers with good communication skills are accessible easily. This paper explores certain issues involved in teaching English to Indian students and offers some suggestions to overcome these hurdles.

INTRODUCTION

“A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (p. 4)”.

Knight and York’s 2004.

Employability consists of various sets of attributes and competencies that are essential for job seekers to sustain employment. Communication skills, flexibility, creating, team building, resilience, time management, etc. are various skills that are required for employability. However, a lot of people fail to adopt these attributes. One of the main reasons is language. Language is a requisite component of communication effectively. The delivery of the message is just as important as the words of the message. As we have entered into a globalized world, the English language has become the pathway to convey our message. In India, English co-exists with many different Indian languages. Owing to its worldwide popularity and importance, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of English. The very fact that English medium schools and Spoken English institutes are cropping up like mushrooms is a sure indication of the consensus of the people in India, in favor of English. As a developing country, India needs English for scientific technology, business, education, travel, media, books etc. “A knowledge of English is imperative for getting access to modern scientific and technological knowledge” (Gokak, 1964:57).

Despite the awareness of the role of English as a global language, and also despite the great effort and money invested in learning the language, there is still a lot to be desired, as many Indian graduates fail to succeed in getting jobs both within and outside India.

Main paper

We shall now look into some of the main reasons for this situation in India. All foreign or second language learners of English aim to use spoken language primarily for transactional function rather than interactional function, i.e. to be able to express their intentions (Richards 2014). But a glance at any syllabus for the teaching of English at school and college levels gives us an idea of what exactly is wrong with it. English is not taught as a language but rather as a subject. There are three or four components in the English texts- prose, poetry, grammar, and non-fiction (either short stories, biographies, or a play). From middle school onwards this is implemented. Students, who are still not well versed in the language, are expected to enjoy the literary pieces. It becomes a barrier for students to analyze the text without any understanding. Students just mug up the essays or summaries and reproduce them in the answer sheets during exams. There is no actual learning taking place. Instead of this, if the thrust is on teaching the four essential skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading, and writing (LSRW) along with

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grammar and vocabulary, it will be more beneficial for the students. Grammar is generally considered tedious by students. If the topics of Grammar are not delivered correctly, it would act as a crucial barrier. However, Grammar can never be taught in isolation but must be integrated with other skills. It should be introduced when required, i.e., if speaking about daily routine is being taught, the simple present tense should be taught. Various situations should be provided to students where they can frame sentences in the Present, Past, and Future. They should be able to get the structure of a sentence rather than just going through the rules. As Ann Burns (2009) says, grammar must be taught “at the point of need”. The basic crux of grammar lessons should be to understand the structure of a sentence and apply it correctly.

After the students are slightly familiar with using English, the functions of English should be introduced. Much later if poetry and prose passages are introduced, the students will be able to comprehend and enjoy the literary pieces. They will be able to understand the theme, characters, plot, etc, in a better way. They would be able to critically analyze texts. As just understanding, a text summary is not enough analysis plays a big role. One more problem is that, in the timetable, there aren't any hours earmarked for speaking. We have amendments to our education policy from time to time, but it's difficult to find a particular allotted time for speaking skills. If only more hours are allotted for speaking, the result would be more fruitful. So there is a very strong case for reviewing the present syllables and redesigning them to incorporate more speaking activities (like role plays, debates, speeches, etc.). Not only do these activities improve their speaking skills but students also learn people skills. Without people skills, employability becomes difficult.

Also, technology can be an impactful tool to learn a language. As we are aware that digitization has made a lot of changes in how we receive data. In our education system itself, we can see the government introducing various educational e-platform wherein students are getting to know their subjects digitally. There are so many apps to support English Language learning such as Podcasts, British Council Library, Cambridge Dictionary, and Knudge where a student can learn pronunciation as well as vocabulary, but that remains unheeded.

Coming to the next issue, which is concerning teachers of English, we find that there are many teachers with good communication skills. But there are also quite a few teachers who have a low proficiency level in English. They might possess a B.Ed. or an M.Ed. degree but there is a problem due to the lack of intelligible pronunciation. They lack proper training as well as it is difficult for them to understand the need of the specific student. Given here is a real-life example- when the second author was a student in sixth standard, one of the teachers of English corrected the author's pronunciation of 'pupil' /pju:pil/ as /rʌpɪl/, and the author went with the same. Only after five years, when there was a change of teacher, did he get to know that it was pupil /pju:pil/. Other examples can be the pronunciation of 'pen' as /pen/, but usually, teachers pronounce it as /peɪn/, and the pronunciation of 'tell' is /tel/, but it is pronounced as /teɪl/. It also becomes difficult for a student to unlearn the pronunciation. If this wrong pronunciation is taught, to say, around three hundred students per year, and even if one-tenth of them become teachers, they in turn pass on the same problem to their students. As years go by, the numbers increase. This contributes to the problem of unemployability due to unintelligible speech and communication. The unintelligible speech is also due to the substitution of English sounds with approximate sounds from the mother tongue. But if teachers are given a ten-day training in phonetics and spoken English, they will become aware of problems due to their mother tongue's influence on English and rectify them.

One more recent trend is that students are enrolling themselves in B.Ed. courses but are not diligent in their studies. Many people manage to get attendance by paying a certain amount to the management, and with just almost close to nil knowledge, get a bachelor's or master's degree. A teacher is the backbone of the education system. If a teacher does not become competent enough in language, it directly affects a student. A teacher should be able to understand the influence of the First Language on students. They should be facilitated on how to train students for the language. Universities and schools should also design the curriculum in such a way that it makes students employable. The curriculum should not be designed to give students information, but a certainty should reflect that they are practically applying the knowledge.

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The students can be encouraged to make use of every opportunity to speak English either with their friends or teachers. The mistakes must be gently corrected and not blown out of proportion. They should realize that their errors are being corrected only with their interest at heart, and not to criticize or demean them. The students should be asked to watch programs on NDTV, Headlines Today, etc., and report the same the next day in class. They should also be given some short story reading cards to read and retell the story to other students in the class.

Visual aids are important tools that can be used to help preceptors in tutoring a foreign language. The benefits of using illustrations in tutoring are huge, ranging from grabbing and maintaining attention to motivating scholars to engage with the lecture's particular content and helping them to retain information. A teacher should be aware of various visual aids that can be used in the classroom to work on the four elements of the English Language i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Visual aids can be vital resources for students. Also, it is important to show the material that can grab their attention and can help them to practice the English Language.

It is important to consider the context in which students develop and their contact with English. The closer contact that they have with English is with music, movies, series, and video games. All these are visual aids and can help students to understand better. Also, their previous knowledge will help them in their learning process and help teachers to know what aspects need to reinforce. Also is important to guide the conditioning and cover it, the correct use of these resources, and how will be presented to the scholars. Establish the purpose of the exertion and what students are anticipated to do and learn with this. Aids can help us to model examples to scholars and guide them to produce their examples. Students need to know that all their trouble and conditioning made, count and have value – also to let them know that all that they learn will be useful and meaningful for them – but not with the purpose to force them to work, establish a value or score to motivate them to learn stylishly. Evaluating their conditioning, the results, and their responses to the visual advertisements will be important to know what other strategies could help them in their literacy process and if they need other coffers to develop better their different chops. In the same way, is important to hear their commentary about the conditioning and their opinions, how they feel working in that way, and check their results.

CONCLUSION

The best way to enable students to express their thoughts and help them communicate with ease is to include hours for speaking activities in the classroom. The syllabus also needs to be redesigned. Teachers, who are yet to pick up the nuances of pronunciation, must be given a short course in phonetics. These changes will ultimately help students to become better communicators and also achievers in their field.

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