Paramountcy of English Writing Skills for Employability in Indian Colleges: Indispensable need for an appropriate mentor in Higher Education

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to gauge the present scenario of the industry, role and importance of English in it, and the need for an English teacher to sustain his student's technical talent as well as compete with the world holding two weapons-field related skills and English. English language fluency among graduates is becoming an important competence that they need for employment. The industry has noted the deteriorating level of English among Indian graduates, thus there is a need of strategies and policies to be implemented. English has been an integral part of Indian curriculum for decades and it plays a major role in finding job placements in renowned organizations. Institution and government are accepting that in global perspective, importance of English cannot be ignored. In today's scenario, increasing importance of English language communication skills as a crucial, vital element in deciding ones employability quotient cannot be overstated. It is high time English teachers prepared themselves to play the role of a trainer or facilitator who can build real competencies and skills to bridge the skill gap by focusing on integrated, multi-skill development of the learners, along with enhancement of English Language skills. English being the most dominant, global language of communication, the present paper attempts to draw attention to the ominous need of transformation in the way an English teacher at professional colleges perceive his role in reference to widening employability crises.

Keywords*: Importance of language, English, employability, soft skill, communication skill, teacher's role.*

Introduction:

India and English language have become inseparable and English has become a connecting language for educated Indians as people speak different languages in each state of the country. As Graddol perceives: "*In 1700s, English became the official language of administration and many educated Indians learnt the language as it helped them to go up the career ladder. The influence of English grew unabated even after the British left India in 1947. Today, English language plays a vital role in higher education, media and administration of private and government organizations. English has become a powerful agent for change in India*" (Graddol, 2010). English language education in particular, has a significant role to play in improving jobseekers' chances on the labour market. Because of the strong discourses that adhere to English as a language of economic development many countries across the world have been moving quickly to try to secure the advantage that English proficiency is supposed to provide. The English language skills areas comprise the abilities of understanding oral and written English and being able to use English orally and in writing adequately in different contexts and for various purposes. It has become an obligatory requirement for a proficient mentor to impart these skills into students to enable them to compete in global arena.

Objective

Aim of this paper is to take a closer look at developing English writing skills, de facto Language for business and ensuring employability

Employability issue for non-English compatible students:

"Employability can be described as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations". It has been found that a number of technically-sound students have not been successful in job interviews just because of their lack of communication skills and there are cases of rank holders in engineering studies who could not go for higher studies to the United States and other English-speaking countries because of their lack of proficiency in English. Just because those students did not get score / band on their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS), they could not make their dream of going to the countries for studies come true Lack of linguistic aptitude, meagre communicative and personality talents often make it difficult for young

graduates to consolidate and express their thoughts commendably and confidently. This affects their prospect of acquisition and retention of employment. A number of engineers employed in IT companies have been sacked because of their poor English communication skills. It is a question of planning, structuring and integrating various activities for the purpose of enhancing the students' learning.

As Clement and Murugavel observe:

"*Many engineering graduates in India are found to be unemployable due to their poor communication skills and lack of confidence. There have been a lot of research papers that have recapped the importance of improving engineering graduates' employability skills; however, the problem of poor communication skills grows unabated in India*." (Clement A. and T. Murugavel, 2015)

Need for Upright English Educators:

Students who study English as a subject acquire a range of valuable skills, which they can transfer to many different employment situations. Their literary and linguistic training can be used in highly competitive fields. Good English teachers bring all these skills to their places of employment together with sensitivity to literature and language. This makes them good candidates as well as instructors for a wide range of careers. 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. As many students feel less confident about their presentation skills, novel methods of training must be introduced in classes to boost self-confidence. Videos of great speakers and leaders along with structured training sessions will surely equip the engineering graduates to share their views effectively and convincingly. More specifically, care must be taken to encourage students with low self-confidence and colleges must arrange separate training sessions as weak students may feel inferior in front of their counterparts who are proficient in English language skills.

In teaching ESP (English for specific Purposes) the focus of a teacher should be on developing the students' written language skills within genres such as memos and formal letters, reports (of varying length), writing documentation (as in manuals, procedure and process descriptions), and writing brief articles for journals, magazines and newspapers. Although there are many varieties of how these documents are set up, conventions and various standards indicate a common lay-out that is widely accepted internationally. Oral presentations, Role Plays and Group discussions in meetings and negotiations are adequate activities for developing the students' oral skills.

As Iqbal and Pratap observe: "*ESP combines subject matter and English language teaching. This combination is highly motivating because students are able to apply what they learn in their English classes to their main field of studies. To create employable graduates for the 21st century is a challenge and it seems to fall on the shoulders of the teaching community*". (Pratap,2015)

This is because the employer needs, student needs and institutional needs find their way naturally into the classroom. The new employer requires team players with team spirit. To work in teams is challenging since most of the universities in India fosters competitive and sometimes combative play by the students at examinations and competitions.

Growth of ESP

From the early 1960's, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today. Its development is reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA in ESP (e.g. The University of Birmingham, and Aston University in the UK) and in the number of ESP courses offered to overseas students in English speaking countries. There is now a well-established international journal dedicated to ESP discussion, "English for Specific Purposes: An international journal", and the ESP SIG groups of the IATEFL and TESOL are always active at their national conferences. In Japan too, the ESP movement has shown a slow but definite growth over the past few years. In particular, increased interest has been spurred as a result of the Mombusho's decision in 1994 to largely hand over control of university curriculums to the universities themselves. This has led to a rapid growth in English courses aimed at specific

disciplines, e.g. English for Chemists, in place of the more traditional 'General English' courses. The ESP community in Japan has also become more defined, with the JACET ESP SIG set up in 1996 (currently with 28 members) and the JALT N-SIG to be formed shortly. Finally, on November 8th this year the ESP community came together as a whole at the first Japan Conference on English for Specific Purposes, held on the campus of Aizu University, Fukushima Prefecture. What is ESP? As described above, ESP has had a relatively long time to mature and so we would expect the ESP community to have a clear idea about what ESP means. Strangely, however, this does not seem to be the case. In October this year, for example, a very heated debate took place on the TESP-L e-mail discussion list about whether or not English for Academic Purposes (EAP) could be considered part of ESP in general. At the Japan Conference on ESP also, clear differences in how people interpreted the meaning of ESP could be seen. Some people described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified.

 Very aware of the current confusion amongst the ESP community in Japan, Dudley-Evans set out in his one hour speech to clarify the meaning of ESP, giving an extended definition of ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics .

Definition of ESP

 Absolute Characteristics   1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners 2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves 3. ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre. Variable Characteristics 1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines 2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English 3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level 4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. 5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems   The definition Dudley-Evans offers is clearly influenced by that of Strevens (1988), although he has improved it substantially by removing the absolute

characteristic that ESP is "in contrast with 'General English'" (Johns et al., 1991: 298), and has included more variable characteristics. The division of ESP into absolute and variable characteristics, in particular, is very helpful in resolving arguments about what is and is not ESP. From the definition, we can see that ESP can but is not necessarily concerned with a specific discipline, nor does it have to be aimed at a certain age group or ability range. ESP should be seen simple as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans describes as an 'attitude of mind'. This is a similar conclusion to that made by Hutchinson et al. (1987:19) who state, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning". Is ESP different to General English? If we agree with this definition, therefore, we begin to see how broad ESP really is. In fact, one may ask 'What is the difference between the ESP and General English approach?' Hutchinson et al. (1987:53) answer this quite simply, "in theory nothing, in practise a great deal". When their book was written, of course, the last statement was quite true. At the time, teachers of General English courses, while acknowledging that students had a specific purpose for studying English, would rarely conduct a needs analysis to find out what was necessary to actually achieve it. Teachers nowadays, however, are much more aware of the importance of needs analysis.

Clearly the line between where General English courses stop and ESP courses start has become very vague indeed. Rather ironically, while many General English teachers can be described as using an ESP approach, basing their syllabi on a learner needs analysis and their own specialist knowledge of using English for real communication, it is the majority of so-called ESP teachers that are using an approach furthest from that described above. Instead of conducting interviews with specialists in the field, analyzing the language that is required in the profession, or even conducting students' needs analysis, many ESP teachers have become slaves of the published textbooks available, unable to evaluate their suitability based on personal experience, and unwilling to do the necessary analysis of difficult specialist texts to verify their contents. The Future of ESP If the ESP community hopes to grow and flourish in the future, it is vital that the community as a whole understands what ESP actually represents. Only then, can new members join with confidence, and existing members carry on the practices which have brought ESP to the position it has in EFL teaching today. In

Japan in particular, ESP is still in its infancy and so now is the ideal time to form such a consensus. Perhaps this can stem from the Dudley-Evans' definition given in this article but I suspect a more rigorous version will be coming soon, in his book on ESP to be published in 1998. Of course, interested parties are also strongly urged to attend the next Japan Conference on ESP, which is certain to focus again on this topic.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP was not a 'planned and coherent movement' but it has emerged because of numerous unified trends based on notably three main reasons that have been identified in the emergence of ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have emphasized two key historical periods that gave life into ESP. In 1945, it was the end of the Second World War which had brought with it an " … age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale…" which was then had given rise to the creation of two forces: technology and commerce world which then had initiated a 'demand for an international language'. Because of the importance of technology and commerce in this period, the demand for English to suit those needs had vastly expanded and people now learn English because of very specific reason: because English had become the language of technology and commerce. Long time ago, the learning of English (or other language) was never this lucid.

Because English was crucially imperative, it had created a brand new type of learners who indeed understand why they need English for and they surely know how to strike while the iron is hot. In addition, the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s was one of the factors that contributed to the development. English had suddenly become a big business and due to this it had created time and money constraints that lead to 'the need of cost effective courses which clearly defined goals'. English has now become 'subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.7).

Another factor that contributes to the emergence of ESP is a revolution in linguistics. In this period of time, the demands of English courses for specific need were increasing while at the same time new ideas began to take place in the field of study (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The conventional linguists sought to describe the features of language (grammar), whereas the radical pioneer in linguistics put a focus on the ways in which language is used in real communication (Widdowson, 1978). The outcome of the research was that language, whether it is spoken or written, varies in certain ways and contexts. In another words, the language use will varies in given the particular context in which English is used, the variant of English will change. This idea was taken one step farther. If language in different situations varies, then it is possible to tailor language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts. Hence, there was an immense increase of in the late 1960s and the early 1970s in researching particular areas of English as we can see in the attempts of describing English for Science and Technology (EST) by Ewer and Latorre (1969), Swales (1971), Selinker and Trimble (1976) and many others. In this phase, it can be concluded that by analyzing the linguistic characteristics of the specific area of study or work, we would be able to identify the English needed by a particular group of learners.

Challenges faced:

The first challenge that needs to be recognized is that it is a wider responsibility, not just of a language teacher; teacher of grammar and structure; but of a trainer or a facilitator who can build real competencies to bridge the gap between corporate requirements and institutional assistances. They need to follow a holistic, integrated; skill based, focused, and meticulously planned approach for well-rounded development of the learners. Second, and the crucial problem is the great shortage of eminent teachers trained in language teaching. The low quality of teachers is due to inadequate exposure and opportunity for these teachers to get trained in the finer nuances of English language and English language teaching. The poor compensation given to the teachers is the also a primary reason we do not get enough good youngsters attracted to the profession. The teacher's remuneration needs to be increased by two to three times the current level, if we have to make a difference. Emphasis must be laid on teacher's language skill, overall competency, enthusiasm and professional awareness. The other serious issue is the wrong approach or methods and lack of awareness about the latest developments and trends in the profession. An English teacher should use the right balance of latest trends in both teaching and training techniques in different proportions depending on the need. A teacher of English language, should strive to contribute to transforming young

graduates into English language proficient, confident, skilled, and competent professionals. He should be always alert and focused about the final goal of integrated, multi-skill development of the learners, along with enhancement of English Language skills in the wake of threatening employability crisis.

Clement and Murugavel pointsout that though there have been many conferences and workshops on new methodologies of language teaching, the reality of classrooms present a different picture due to various reasons:

1) Lack of training for English professors.

2) Students of different levels in the same class.

3) Number of students in each class (60 per class).

4) Lack of time to complete the prescribed syllabus.

5) More importance on written exams (traditional method in India).

6) Pressure on teachers to produce high pass percentage in final exams.

7) Lack of quality text books.

8) Use of workbooks that compile the exercises from previous university question papers.

9) Lack of support from college managements.

10) English being treated as yet another subject to study.

11) Irrelevant syllabus design.

(12) Lack of relevant methodologies (Clement and Murugavel, 2015)

Propositions:

Teachers can obtain maximum benefits by implementing these prepositions:

- To create awareness about the importance of language skills in job interviews and workplace activities, 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. As many students feel less confident about their presentation skills, novel methods of training must be introduced in classes to boost self-confidence.

- Videos of great speakers and leaders along with structured training sessions will surely equip the engineering graduates to share their views effectively and convincingly.

- Care must be taken to encourage students with low self-confidence and colleges must arrange separate training sessions as weak students may feel inferior in front of their counterparts who are proficient in English language skills.

- Teachers can create experience- sharing opportunities for students to make use of their experience in doing the assignment.

- Teachers must teach oral skills and strategies while preparing students for communication activities.

- Also, it is desirable that teachers rate the difficulty level of oral tasks to suit their students' ability to communicate.

- If easy activities with clear instructions are introduced in the class, students will feel comfortable exercising their skills with ease and the difficulty level can be increased as the students' confidence level enhances.

- Many students' feels that evaluation based on theory papers must be scrapped and students must be continuously assessed on communication activities such as individual presentations and group discussions.

The board of studies, English professors and industry professionals must come together to formulate a syllabus that will suit the current requirements of the industry and a training program for English professors to elevate and amend their focus to English for employability. "*Though many teachers understand the importance of communicative competence, the limitations of classroom reality block them from implementing their ideas*". (Jihyeon Jeon, 2009).

The guiding principle proposed for ESP by Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 8) "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you what English you need" is in perfect accord with the above statement along with the history and development of ESP. Based on the history and development of ESP discussed above, we can see that the learners' needs of English play an

important role in developing and designing the learning materials to fulfill their specific needs.

Conclusion:

There is no single most excellent way of teaching English as it is a foreign language. The successful language teacher will not confine himself to only a single method. A method which is appropriate with one class on one occasion will not necessarily suit to the same class at another time. Likewise, a method which is suitable for one language teacher while teaching a particular language item may not be applicable for other teacher in the same or similar context. There has been a gradual shift from a literature based foreign language to equipping learners with communicative skills for interaction globally. Most English language teachers and more significantly most teacher trainers adhere to communicative methodology today. Instead, English language teachers should put into practice a great deal of diverse activities to keep themselves up-to-date and enhance their practices to benefit their students according to their need.

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