

Enhancing the Employability Skills of Engineering Students through Effective use of English and Soft Skills

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Abstract— In this Age of Globalization and Internet, English and Soft skills are quite essential to get a decent job. So, motivating the engineering students to enhance their English and Soft skills for better employability is a challenging aspect for an English teacher.

Fortunately, with the advent of English language laboratories with the latest software one can impart effective communication skills with some innovative techniques. In this paper we will focus on special methodologies developed recently like co-operative learning, task and participatory approaches to develop higher order soft skills like excelling in group discussions, analytical skills etc. Proper group division along with several interactive activities and collaborative strategies is the key to success. Corporate sector really needs such skilled engineers.

Keywords- higher order soft skills group division cooperative learning employability

I. INTRODUCTION

These days most students join an engineering course to get a good job. In this Age of Globalization and Internet the corporate sector expects adequate competence in English and soft skills also apart from their area of specialization. So corporate sector also should be made an important stake holder in designing the curriculum of the engineering course. In this period of fast changing technologies there is a lot of demand for skilled engineers and the corporate sector really needs such engineers. India is producing around 2 lakh engineers per year. So, in normal circumstances the employability aspect for Indian engineers should not have been a problem. Paradoxically, according to surveys by many agencies like NASSCOM, National Employability Report (2014), Wheel box and Aspiring minds, only around 25% of our engineers are employable. One of the main reasons for their non-employability is their inefficiency in the competence regarding English and communication skills. According to specialists there is a huge difference and gap between what is taught in our colleges and what the industry wants. (The Hindu 21st Jan 2015) The issue became more complicated with the global recession and the consequent economic challenges faced by many companies. So, the corporate sector cannot afford the luxury of re-training

employees in soft skills. Another practical problem is that it is not easy to change the syllabus as regularly required by the corporate sector because it is not easy to find well qualified faculty, software programs and the machinery required to establish such infrastructure. So what is the ideal solution?

Apart from competency in their core area, we have identified some higher order soft skills and other issues which are absolutely necessary these days. It is assumed that they have basic English language skills. The soft skills (also called as life skills in certain areas) that are recommended to be included are as follows

1. Analytical skills
2. Problem solving skills
3. Logical and coherence competence
4. Higher order presentation skills and
5. Group discussions (with an emphasis on developing the skills required to be an asset to an organization).

All these skills are inter – related and the students should be trained in these things in an integrated and holistic manner. Right now some of the topics mentioned above are part of the curriculum, but these skills are imparted in a routine and casual manner and not with the seriousness required to develop their competence to be a part of the main system of core engineering subjects. Such skills can be mainly and effectively taught only in labs with the necessary audio –visual equipment and specialized software available for such skills. But our exam system gives more emphasis to theoretical subjects. Our exam system therefore indirectly promotes only rote learning and remembering by-heart but not on the higher order skills like analytical ability, lateral thinking, problem solving ability, creativity, negotiation skills and the ability to adjust and adapt in a group. A world bank report also mentions this. So the regulatory bodies like AICTE and UGC should take these issues seriously and regularly monitor and see to it that such skills are implemented properly in the syllabus. So creating a space for a theory cum lab course for advanced soft skills could be one of the solutions to this vexed issue. The job prospects of our engineers can increase if the corporate sector is also a stake holder in designing the curriculum. Infosys, for example,

created a special higher order soft skills syllabus in their Campus Connect programs.

II. THE ACTUAL TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS

Group division of students is an important element in this process, but this group division should not be done in a superficial manner. A lot of care should be taken to identify students who share similar skills, ideas and beliefs. Teachers who are specialists in these areas should be assigned to them. It is no doubt a complicated process but when implemented with enough rigour, passion and commitment the results will be highly productive. The students should be divided into pairs initially and later on into small groups of 5 or 6 each.

Latest methodologies like cooperative learning [as cited in Diana Larsen –Freeman (2001)] task and participatory approaches emphasize a lot on careful planning in the group division of students. Faculty should actively encourage the learners to participate and cooperate with each other in group activities. Many students feel uncomfortable to talk in a large group and they also can't express their innermost ideas to the teacher.

In such a scenario small groups are like a God sent boon for such students. Most Indian classrooms have around 60 students and so there will definitely be at least 10 groups. So

the teacher can't obviously concentrate a lot, on one particular student. So he/she should appoint group leaders / associate group leaders to further de-centralize the process of developing these higher order soft skills like analytical ability, lateral thinking etc.

III. CONCLUSION

The teacher / associate teacher should clearly give written feedback forms for self-assessment by students. In this way the instructors should try to make the learners autonomous which will boost their confidence not only in English, but also develops their personality. In this entire process they will develop techniques of cooperation, voluntary contribution and leadership qualities. Apart from competence in their core engineering subjects if the students are confident in such higher order soft skills, corporate sector will immediately recruit them.

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