



**THE ROLE OF LEARNING ENHANCEMENT & PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT OF PUPIL-TEACHERS IN THE PRESENT SCENARIO (IN
TERMS OF SOFT SKILLS)**

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Abstract

In 21st century, we seek to promote excellence in teaching and learning in higher education and to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, to provide the best possible learning experience for all students and teachers. The new challenges are there and the engineering profession has to face it, confirming the need to restructure engineering curricula, teaching and learning practices, and processes, including assessment. Engineering graduates possessing merely technical knowledge is no longer a guarantee for a successful career. As a professional, the aim of the student is to succeed in the career path they have chosen for themselves. They want to be the best at what they do and move forward. However, sometimes students might wonder why they are not getting the “breaks” they need. Basically they have the hard skills; the technical knowledge and skills that will ensure that they do their job to the highest level of quality. And while all countries are facing this dilemma, India is also struggling the most. It has been argued that most Indian engineering educational institutions are struggling with the systemic problem of centralization coupled with an archaic examination system that is detrimental to student learning. This article examines some internationally renowned educational institutions that are embracing the growing importance of non-technical subjects and soft skills in 21st century engineering curricula. It will then examine the problems that India faces in doing the same. The 21st century has arrived, bringing with it new social, economic and environmental challenges. The world has become a global village. The new challenge for engineering is how to produce goods and services, and develop infrastructure, without damaging the environment. 'Carbon footprint' is the new buzzword in any engineering project. In the last century, there were three constraints: humans, material and money. Engineering education needs a new paradigm if it is going to successfully train future engineers to fulfill society's new demands.

“If you keep doing what you have always done, you are going to get what you always got”.

All teachers understand how to work effectively with ELLs (English Language Learners) in their own classes, including:

- *Culture plays an essential role in the classroom*
- *Strategies to scaffold content instruction to make it more comprehensible*
- *Basic principles of second language acquisition & how to promote the development of academic English*

The term curriculum is derived from the Latin word currere meaning “racecourse” , includes contents, learning activities, teaching methodology, supporting material, methods of assessment and

facilities. When we refer to “curriculum innovation”, we are referring to the ways in which many factors may contribute to transformations in classroom activity.



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Aspects of Curriculum Development

Aims/Goal, Objectives and Competence

The term of “aim” and “goal” are used interchangeably (Richard 2001; 112; Zais 1976) as the purpose and basic principle of curriculum development. Objective is more specific level of purposes. It is defined as “the most immediate specific outcomes of classroom interaction” (Zais 1976: 306). Content relates to what teacher will teach. Miller & Seller (1985: 185) are used “content” interchangeably with subject matter, knowledge, concepts and Idea. In language teaching context, content relates to subject matter and linguistics matter (Krahnke 1987: 3). Curriculum design consists of subject-centered, learner-centered and problem-centered. In today’s dynamic and corporate world ,certainly, with the growing importance of English in communication and travel, there is an increasing importance attached to a good knowledge of English in the employment market at the national and international level in this economic world. English language has important utility values in today’s economic construction, culture, and education fields. English language is necessary in each area of life. If there is a barrier to English language in this economic world, it may hamper the communication. We are living in an age of dramatic and unprecedented linguistic revolution, the making of a global language.

Objectives of Communication

Major part of our active life is spent in communicating with others. People need to communicate as they move from situation to situation, in family, organization and other social groups for getting their work done and for relationships. The main objectives of communication are as follows:

- 1) Exchange of information
- 2) Advice and counseling
- 3) Persuasion
- 4) Suggestion
- 5) Education
- 6) Motivation
- 7) Raising morale

- 8) Warning
- 9) Global business environment
- 10) Technological advancement
- 11) Need for better human & Public relations
- 12) Gaining feedback

As we know that the market is recovering from its deep recession and demand for fresh recruits with Engineering MBA or is picking up in the IT/ITES sectors, the HR manager at MNC and other Indian companies are equally busy in hiring soft skills trainers to train the fresh batch of recruits. Since most of companies have realized that no matter which ever the professional ground a candidate may come from, the need to fill the soft skills gap has become very essential to meet company expectation when it comes to interacting or delivering value to their customers. Unlike in the west where the students should pick up the soft skills like business communication, leadership, behavioral, teamwork, and corporate ethics independent of their professional choice, In India the academicians have not paid attention to this yet.. As more Universities are being privatized and many Institutions are going for foreign collaboration to pick up the latest curriculum and teaching methodologies, hopefully they will make it mandatory for every student to absorb these soft skills before they graduate as well rounded professional ready to be absorbed in the Industry. The soft skills curriculum should include 1 semester worth of course work encompassing all types of soft skills like communication, behavioral, body language, phone ethics, teamwork, conflict resolution, leadership, and business communications. The MBA institutions can go one step forward and include International culture and customer behavior specific to countries with strong ties to India regarding business like Japan, South Korea, China, and Germany. For the benefit of the Industry, it would be better to standardize the training content across the country so that basic needs of the employers would be fulfilled independent of where the students come from.

A new perspective

Globalization has brought a lot of importance to the functional English. It becomes easier for a student with good communication skills and well groomed personality to get a good job in this competitive era. Companies are looking for candidates who are smart and can present themselves well. So soft skills training has to be given importance in undergraduate classes. Grooming is also necessary for both. As communication skills is a part of soft skills, English faculty is the right person to be the soft skills trainer after undergoing professional training.

What are Soft Skills?

The hard truth about soft skills is that these get little respect, but can make or break the career of the students.

The collection of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark people to varying degrees.

Professional Skills

- Learned from books
- Learned from hands-on experience
- Abilities to do things in the chosen career

Soft Skills

- Not learned from books
- Work ethics
- Habits and traits

Soft Skills

- Professionalism
- Positive attitude
- Communication ability
- Group/Team Abilities
- Understanding of continuing learning
- Critical*, logical*, enthusiasm* – thinking
- Entitlement
- People skills and so on.

As the name suggests soft skills is not a visible skill like the domain subject content but it helps in improving the personality of the person. We can make a distinction between hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills refer to technical and academic skills while soft skills refer to wide-ranging personal and interpersonal skills. Hard skills can be easily defined, measured and observed, while it is difficult to measure soft skills as these are intangible. It includes :

- communication skills,
- interpersonal skills,
- group dynamics,
- team work,
- body language,

- etiquettes,
- selling skills,
- presentation skills,
- Confidence building etc.
- Thinking skills and Problem solving skills.
- Entrepreneur skill

Where do we learn Soft Skills?

- Work place
- Social Activities
- Family
- Friends
- Celebrations
- Workshops/Seminars
- Community Groups
- Volunteer activities
- Books

Prerequisites to learn Soft Skills

- Honest
- Truthful
- Ethical

Common Failures

- Failure to establish and lead an effective Faculty
- Failure to treat others with respect
- Failure to develop trust
- Failure to identify and address stakeholder issues
- Failure to establish appropriate consensus
- Failure to align with management goals
- Failure to seek timely help when problems arise
- Failure to admit a mistake and make changes
- Failure to delegate and utilize other members effectively
- Failure to solicit input before making changes
- Failure to understand the impact of your personal style

The soft skills must be acquired by each and every individual in the institutions of higher learning without which, the student is regarded as incompetent in the above skill. The soft skills can be regarded as the additional generic skills and a bonus to the student. If these skills are acquired by the students together with the soft skills. If soft skill is inculcated in the curriculum along with grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary exercises, it will surely boost the confidence level of students in the selection processes of the job interview and fetch them a good job. Job market has changed due to repurcation of globalization. These days jobs are not just administrative ones. In addition to subject knowledge, one is expected to have pleasing as well as smart personality to get an edge over others in this competitive era. An English faculty's role is not just improving the language skills of his/her students, but also fine tuning their soft skills. With the corporate exposure, faculty will be in a better position to prepare the students in the lines of corporate expectations. In addition to communication skills, soft skills, helps to succeed in interviews and group discussions and help the students in getting the job of their choice. Students' inability to communicate well in English has many reasons behind it:

- The lack of strong basic foundation of English language continues to haunt the students in their college life too.
- The fear of failure before others, stage fear, nervousness, lack of content etc are also the reasons for students to lag behind.
- Ignorance of grammar and overconfidence. So English language teaching should be transformed into soft skills training.

Soft skills should cater to the needs of fine tuning the personality of the students. These courses are beyond the reach of common lower middle class students. The government can help these large financially down trodden students by implementing soft skills in English language curriculum.

Even multi-national companies look forward for candidates who can speak good English. They give importance to oral communication skills and accent. Just content is insufficient to get an edge over others in this competitive age. MNCs expect their prospective employees to be young, smart, and confident candidates. As there is more importance to language part of English learning than literature these days, the lovers of literature may feel sidelined. Traditional learners of English language will miss the great works of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton, Shelly... if changes are brought out in the curriculum along the lines of the above suggestions. But changes are a part of the system. Any system for that matter undergoes change with the new developments and when the existing ones become outdated.

One has to move on with the changing times. The people who like to read the great works of literature will continue to read it even without the supporting curriculum. Reading great books will remain hobby or special interest for people who are really interested in literature. It need not be imposed on the curriculum. Those who want to continue in academics and want to take up study of literature will pursue it. It is not necessary to generalize the English language curriculum for the sake of literature lovers.

Role of English Faculty

An English faculty's role is not just improving the language skills of his/her students, but also fine tuning their soft skills. They should encourage the learners to take responsibility of their learning, take risks and to discover knowledge as students need it. The teachers have to understand that unnecessary intervention in the learning process is harmful. The functional usage of language has to be given importance by the teachers. The teachers have to provide enough opportunities for the learners to develop strategies to become effective speakers, writers and listeners of English. The time has arrived to brainstorm on what to teach in English language classrooms in order to hone their skills. The textbooks which are filled with prose and poetry are not catering to the changing demands of the student community. The students are not supposed to appreciate the works of literature to improve their communication skills. In the present context, where good verbal and written communication is in demand, our text books don't give the necessary input required by them. What can be done by the universities while designing the syllabus, so that students don't need outside support? The curriculum designers need to take a feedback and suggestions from the students and the faculty members on what changes are required. The English faculty's role is no more mere teaching the works of literary stalwarts, or grammar. He/she has to contribute to the improvement of vocabulary, communication skills, presentation skills and confidence building of the students. The ultimate purpose of any course is to prepare the students for a good placement. The students should feel confident of themselves with the content and the ability to communicate the knowledge as and when required. As the domain subjects take care to improve the content part of a course, the English language classes should cater to the demands of personality development or soft skills. In most undergraduate colleges, students don't take language sessions seriously as they find that the syllabus is not that useful for them. So the attendance is very low or even if they attend too, they are not attentive. So the English syllabus needs to be customized according to the changing needs.

Conclusion

The time has arrived to reflect on and customize the existing English language curriculum. The designing of curriculum should be contextual and need based. The existing curriculum needs to be updated constantly to the changing requirements of the students. In the changing scenario after globalisation, soft skills has become more important than the study of literature. English class room should be converted into language lab where students are encouraged to bring out their creativity. More attention has to be given to practical exercises than theoretical teaching of literature. Students should be trained to perform and speak in different situations with confidence. The methods of training should be through role plays, debates, and group discussions. In addition , there should be sessions on etiquettes, body language, group dynamics, and interpersonal skills. Finally, English curriculum should serve the purpose of giving a helping hand to the students to move ahead in their chosen path with confidence.

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