

The Role of Employability Skills in the new Job Market: Indian Scenario

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ABSTRACT

The Hindu presents the deplorable condition of present-day education system which focuses only on theoretical knowledge, and a stark negligence of the practical know - how of present-day graduates. Many of the young graduates fail in interviews due to lack of 'employability skills'. Employability skills involve the development of an expertise, knowledge base or mindset that makes the interviewee more attractive to employers. Employability skills are also termed as employment skills, soft skills, life skills or foundational skills. These skills improve the prospective employee's performance, minimize errors and promote collaboration with their co-workers, which enables them to perform their role more effectively. So why does one need 'employability skills'? This paper attempts to answer this question in the context of the current Indian scenario.

Employers today look for certain qualities and skills in their prospective employees in addition to the academic qualifications which make the job market very competitive. These skills are called 'Employability skills.' These skills may not be job-specific, but enhance and improve the individual's performance and value at the workplace. These skills also impact the progress of the individual's career graph. Education and experience undeniably are essential eligibility criteria to apply for a job but in order to be successful, in the role undertaken by the individual in an institution; s/he has to exhibit a plethora of skills known as 'employability skills.' Employability skills mean here that not only the specialist and technical skills associated with the job but also 'soft skills' to acquire and sustain the job. And one of the foremost soft skills that need to be focussed in the Indian scenario is effective communication skills in English.

Keywords: Employability, Skills, Hard skills, Soft skills, ESP, CALL, ICT, Multimedia

"The resume reflected a master's degree, but the professional status still read the same — educated but unemployed. This is a story common to a number of students in the country. With an overarching bent towards theoretical education with little or no exposure to practical know-how, this scenario has long been in the making.

*With 15 million youngsters entering the workforce each year, more than 75 per cent are not job-ready. India will need 700 million skilled workers by 2022 to meet the demands of a growing economy. This glaring imbalance, due to lack of technical and soft skills, points towards the urgent and growing need to make young Indians job-ready, focusing on young graduates to augment their employability."*¹

The Hindu presents the deplorable condition of present day education system which focuses only on theoretical knowledge, and a stark negligence of the practical know - how of present day graduates. Many of the young graduates fail in interviews due to lack of 'employability skills'.

According to PromodBhasin, Chairman of CII National Committee on Skill Development, Founder, Genpact and Chairman, The Skills Academy, -"Currently with one of the highest youth population in the world, India faces its greatest opportunity as well as challenge. It is slated to become the world's youngest nation by 2022 and this population bulge not only provides for a huge reservoir of manpower, but also draws unprecedented focus towards making this talent pool employable. The government of India through its initiatives, such as Make in India, Smart Cities, Digital India, Start up India; are working towards making India a global economic power house. Skill development is an essential catalyst for the success of each of these initiatives."²(4)

Employability and its importance

Employability is defined as: "A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy."³

Employability skills are defined variously as "transferable skills needed by an individual to make them 'employable'⁴; "a group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in modern workplace"⁵; "Employability skills are a set of skills and behaviours that are necessary for every job"⁶.

Employability skills involve the development of an expertise, knowledge base or mindset that makes the interviewee more attractive to employers. Employability skills are also termed as employment skills, soft skills, life skills or foundational skills. These skills improve the prospective employee's performance,

minimize errors and promote collaboration with their co-workers, which enables them to perform their role more effectively.

Though employability skills may not be listed in a job description, but they are important skills that can make the individual more attractive to prospective employers. The candidate having these traits and skills out do other candidates who are vying for the same position, and a better chance of getting hired.

Thus employability is a broader set of attributes and skills that help a graduate to progress throughout his/her career. So why does one need 'employability skills'?

To remain competitive: University education is an advantage in the future career of an individual as it gives him or her an opportunity to apply for jobs that specify that one must be a graduate with a certain subject and grade which may be relevant to some employers. However, a first-class may not fetch a job when in competition with others having similar academic qualifications. Having a unique mix of skills, abilities and personal qualities adds to the USP of an individual in the job market. It is an individual's 'employability skills' which would enable them to stand out from the crowd.

To achieve your goals: Present day work places are ever in flux, which requires an individual to involve oneself in varied job roles/profiles. Even if one stays on in the same job, it is likely that the same job would change its nature with time. Employability skills are 'transferable'; they are malleable to any situation an individual is put in.

To enhance your education: Having a degree with a great academic record does not suffice in the present day job market. Gaining additional knowledge learnt through work experience, volunteering or short vocational courses help in holistic education.

To engage in the student experience: Apart from the regular academic records of an individual the present employers also show keen interest in the individual's participation in co-curricular activities, community development and social services at school and college. These additional activities help the individual to grow into a well-rounded personality.

Employers today look for certain qualities and skills in their prospective employees in addition to the academic qualifications which make the job market very competitive. These skills are called 'Employability skills'. These skills may not be job-specific, but enhance and improve the individual's performance and value at the workplace. These skills also impact the progress of the individual's career graph.

It is difficult to list employability skills as there are innumerable and hard to teach, unlike job-specific skills. Most of the skills and traits are innate and some come naturally through education, experiences and environment. Some skills need to be improved upon and some need to be developed, and one such skill is communication.

It is a fundamental urge to communicate. Communication skill is the first and foremost skill required to support other skills and activities. Nothing is possible in the world without communication. Every other skill is dependent on communication skills of an individual. At best in simple words communication can be defined as the act of transferring a message which is easily understood by the recipient. Although communication skills take a life time to master, no one can claim to have perfected it. However, communication skills can be learnt and improved upon in a number of ways to ensure that the information is transmitted and received effectively.

Employability skills, which are also known as Soft skills or Interpersonal Skills, consist of a range of skills. Some of the Employability skills are –

1. Communication skills
2. Team work
3. Problem solving skills
4. Planning and organizing
5. Leadership skills
6. Technology
7. Self – management
8. Decision making skills
9. Conflict resolution skills
10. Ethics

The Importance of Effective Communication Skills:

Communication skills help in varied aspects of life, - professional and social. The ability to communicate accurately, clearly and effectively is an essential life skill which cannot be overlooked. Thus, communication is one of the most important employability skills because it is an essential part of almost any job.

There are five elements involved in the communication skills: the sender, receiver, message, medium and feedback. All these elements work together to deliver and understand messages clearly and efficiently,

eliminating unnecessary misunderstandings and errors. Effective communication skills make a candidate more likely to be employed because they can enhance a company's productivity and efficiency and help prevent the waste of valuable time and resources.

As an effective communicator the prospective employee should be able to convey his/her message clearly in order to achieve certain outcomes, listen actively to the co-workers, employer or superior's instructions, ideas and intentions. As per the requirement of the job the candidate must be competent in different types of communication skills. For instance, a teacher needs to have excellent verbal and non-verbal communication skills in order to be effective in classroom.

Communication skills are needed in almost all aspects of life:

- **Professionally:** While applying for jobs, for sustaining a job, or for promotion, demonstration of good communication skills is a must. Communicating with a wide variety of people, maintaining eye contact, and use of appropriate vocabulary, Paralanguage as per the need and the audience is essential for effective oral communication. Similarly, presentation of ideas appropriately with clarity, conciseness and right tone is essential in written communication skills. These are the basic yet essential skills of communication that most employers seek.
- **Personal effectiveness:** In one's personal life too good communication skills help improve personal relationships by helping to understand others, and to be understood. Failure to communicate has been the cause of breakdown of a number of partnerships and relationships. Listening is a part of effective communication skills too.

Good communication skills can improve the way an individual operates through life, smoothening the way in relationships with others. Poor communication skills, on the other hand, can sour relationships from business to personal, and make life significantly harder.

Some people effortlessly understand how to communicate without even trying as they are able to tailor their language, tone and message according to the audience, and get their point across quickly and succinctly, as they wish it to be. They are also able to understand the messages sent to them rapidly, decode both what is said, and what has not been said. Though this looks effortless, such effective communicators must have spent a lot of time honing these skills.

Developing excellent communication skills is a long term project, as one continues to learn throughout their lives. There are a few things that anyone who wishes to communicate effectively can do like reading anything of interest, interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, listening, etc.

Education goes hand in hand with employment and in the present age this adage has become obsolete. In addition to education a set of skills are required now which not only help you to acquire a job but keep it. In his article "Survey of ELT in Today's World"⁷ Professor Mohanraj Sathuvalli identifies the following themes and subthemes:

A. Language Teaching in the present day.

1. Teaching English in Global Scenario
2. Innovative practices in ELT
3. Communicative competence in English
4. Classroom Management and Practice

B. English for Specific Purposes

C. Teaching English through Literature

D. Technology in Language Teaching

1. Computer Assisted Language Learning/Teaching
2. Technology enabled ELT
3. Multimedia classroom
4. Language through ICT

E. English Language for Employability

1. Soft Skills Training (linked to communicative competence)

From the above list it is clear that training in 'Employability Skills' is gaining importance in order to succeed in the job market.

In India, education and employment go hand in hand. Those who have knowledge of English language stand a better chance of getting a job. In this sense English has become a language of opportunities. This has created a need for people who can communicate fluently in English with native-like competency. Having the knowledge of one's subject is not enough in the present day job market. It is essential to be able to present oneself effectively in interviews, in presentations, and interpersonal communication within the organizations to sustain the job. The present day Indian youth excels in theoretical knowledge and

innovative ideas but due to lack of effective communication skills lag behind. According to Nirmal Singh, Founder and CEO of *Wheebox* – “If we look at the current stock of the skill landscape in India, the situation is alarming. As per *India Skills Report 2017*, we found out that all the students entering the job market across the country, hardly two-fifth meet the criteria of the employment set by the employees⁹.” (16)

So far the focus has only been on the theoretical knowledge, now the focus has shifted on to practical use of knowledge supported with certain skills required to execute any job effectively. The government of India has taken an initiative in this direction. It stresses on the development of skills in young graduates so that they are employment ready as they graduate, as has been pointed out in the *India skills Report 2017*:

“The gravity of this situation was very well understood by the Government that came into power two years back, and much needed direction and initiatives were triggered right from the top. The 12th Five year plan provided a framework to address this issue. The Ministry of Skill development and Entrepreneurship was created to focus on skill development and job creation at the same time. The new national policy of skill development and numerous other initiatives like PMKVY were launched. Matchmaking between Job and Skill became a reality with the opening of Model career centres (which could be called the modern day employment exchanges) and a special focus was given to skilling and re-skilling in the Union Budget as well.”¹⁰(11)

Amongst all the skills, communication skills has been given prime importance and as English has become not only the global language, but also the bridge language of communication across the globe, it has become essential for professions in both private and public sectors. Good communication skills in English is one of the most ineluctable skills for getting a job, sustaining it and keeping it. All the remaining skills go hand in hand or rather follow communication skills.

“Human capital is referred to as the knowledge, expertise and skills acquired by a person through the medium of education and training. Tertiary education plays an important role in the provision of human capital for achieving k-economy. Industries were competing against each other in order to adapt and remain in the market. In order to achieve this goal, the industry must have a competitive employee that will have the ability to withstand the global market. In order to achieve that, employer spends a lot of investment to develop the human capital of workers to master the skills needed in the arena of globalization. However, the cost of developing human capital is increasing; with these, employers expect educational institutions to produce graduates with employability skills required by the market without additional training from the industry¹¹.” (430-431)

To conclude, present day employers are looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experience. Training unskilled employees involves a lot of capital and time investment, therefore present day employers look for graduates who are employable. Education and experience undeniably are essential eligibility criteria to apply for a job but in order to be successful, in the role undertaken by the individual in an institution; s/he has to exhibit a plethora of skills known as ‘employability skills’. Employability skills mean here that not only the specialist and technical skills associated with the job but also ‘soft skills’ to acquire and sustain the job. And one of the foremost soft skills that need to be focussed in the Indian scenario is effective communication skills in English.

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