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ENGLISH FOR EMPLOYABILITY (EFE)

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ABSTRACT

The idea for "English for Employability" (EFE) has relevance to two segments of students fraternity. In the first segment are students from English Medium Schools. Many of them are not able to communicate in English desirable for honourable jobs both in public and private sectors.

The second segment of students is from vernacular schools who are bright in academics but not anywhere near expected standards in English competency. Their number is large. They have the potential. They richly deserve a better quality of life. They can immensely contribute to national prosperity.

The idea for "English for Employability" (EFE) seems to fit well in both the above scenarios. It won't be easy to put it into practice but it is worth any effort. To put it succinctly, an exclusive curriculum for 'English for Employability' can yield wonderful results. Lack in one skill (EFE) should not be allowed to withhold windfall of opportunities for young Indians.

**Key Words:** Employability, vernacular, competency, succinctly, windfall, opportunities.

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Introduction

When we take an objective look of life, we notice that the one thing that dominates the psyche of all adults, most of the time, is how to earn and earn well for their livelihood, for better quality of life. And every earning is directly, indirectly related to employment. Any skill which can enhance our employability and beget employment fascinates our imagination. Every employment is related to one skill or the other. We are going to deal here in detail about the role or contribution of competency in English as a key skill for employability.

**What does EFE mean and why we need it?**

The idea of English for employability, in its generic sense, has three broad segments in its application to the real life situations.

In the first segment are persons who come from well off background, study in reputed English medium schools and Colleges/Universities and settle for good jobs or in business of their own. Their number is small. They do put in a lot of efforts to reach where they do. And the one skill they have in common is their grip over verbal and written English, which stands them in good stead whole life long. They are happy. Their parents are proud of them. We are happy for them. However, it was important to highlight this segment of people lest

it interferes with a clear understanding of the topic in hand. In other words, there are already people amidst us who are doing very well for themselves professionally owing to one key skill in common and that is command over English language in addition to their core domain skills.

In the second segment come persons who have studied either in the so-called English medium schools or in the vernacular schools. They are good, very good in academics but they cannot communicate in English. Their knowledge of English is often limited to answering questions like “What is your name”, “Where do you stay” etc. The moment you ask them, “What do you want to become in life and why,” you will witness an instant blank look on their face. It's not that they don't know the answer; they know the answer but not able to express it for want of adequate knowledge of English. Most of them are graduates. They come from all disciplines like Engineering, Medicines, CAs, MBAs, Lecturers etc. Their number is large. They have the potential to learn English but not enough inclination or platform or provision to do it. They are not able to give their best and, in turn, make a mark in their professions for lack of competency in English language. They can immensely increase their individual professional value as well as contribute to national prosperity with the addition of just one skill called Competency in English Language (CIEL).

Then comes the third and last segment. It comprises of people who have studied up to or beyond High School and has settled for skilled or semi-skilled jobs on their own or in private sectors. They are neither able to nor expected to communicate in English. Their number is reasonably large. Their skill is their forte. They are often appreciated for their skills and execution. In fact, given their academic qualification and hardly any formal training, they are doing very well for themselves. But they can do far better with a little knowledge of English language. A grip over scores of English Expressions to make common-place marketing transactions can increase their business and improve their earnings manifold. And, a formal, tailor-made curriculum of short duration can bridge the gap between their core skill and their marketing skill.

To conclude, the people in the second segment should be our major focus of attention as a target group to impart English for Employability (EFE) for their sheer numbers and potential.

### **Why Indians don't learn English for Employability (EFE)?**

#### **(The Myth and the Realities)**

#### **1. English is a very tough subject**

There is a widespread mindset, and in turn, dread among the students that English is a tough language to learn. This is not true. English is not as tough a language as it is made out to be. There are far more difficult subjects like Maths, Science, Medicine, Engineering, etc which students are able to master. Then why not English! It is only a matter of attitude. All the same, it is there and needs a change.

#### **2. English is dispensable**

There is not enough awareness among the students as to how Competency in English Language can immensely increase their job prospects overnight, for whole life long. The benefit is not limited to speaking and writing in English. A person who can read, understand and appreciate any text in English, develops an instant access to unlimited sources of information/knowledge and, in turn, changes his/her perspective of life, for life. Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why the students from reputed English Medium Schools generally perform better in job-interviews and in career growth.

#### **3. English is perceived as a “Necessary Evil Subject”.**

The importance of English for Employability has not been brought home with the Indian students and Educational Institutions as seriously as required. “Pass Marks in English will do,” is a common refrain we come to hear in most parts of India; be it a classroom, be it a staff room, be it a drawing room. With the exception of a few Southern States, English is seen as a Necessary Evil Subject to somehow pass and forget about it. This mass psychology is doing all the harm in learning English; especially the English for Employability (EFE).

#### **4. Too much Stress on Grammar**

There is a problem with the curriculum for English subject in schools as well. Most of the curriculum lay too much stress on the technical aspects of the language at the cost of verbal English. The common example is that many students who secure 70% or more marks in English in Matric are not able to write or speak correct English. A grip over English grammar makes sense only when complemented with written and

verbal English. At present, the English Grammar and Verbal English run like two parallel lines; they must be united.

#### **5. Good is the Enemy of Best**

The biggest tragedy of all is that the moment one is able to speak a few sentences in English, one thinks that one has learnt enough of the language for life. This is especially true of the students from the run-of-the-mill English Medium Schools. Most of the students' vocabulary and formation of sentences get literally struck or hanged at 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> Std's vocabulary and expressions. It may sound strange but many students have same limited vocabulary in their B.A., B.Sc., BE Final Year, which they had long back in their school days.. Poor reading habit (of Newspaper, Magazines, Journals, etc) is another reason for this phenomenon.

#### **How to impart English for Employability (EFE)?**

**Make EFE a National Agenda:** First and foremost, the government must show the courage of conviction to accept that the nation badly needs English for Employability(EFE) and make it a National Agenda. We have a classical case of China to follow. China was more or less like India, as an English Speaking Nation, a decade ago, when it realized the importance of English to survive in the competitive global market. It has been reported that the mission was successful and today it has a large number of professionals with competency in English. Needless to mention, given its magnitude, the Mission EFE will have to be a Government Project.

**Bring Home the Importance of EFE:** A conscientious effort should be made at all levels to bring home the importance of learning English for Employment. Competency in English is no more a luxury. It is a key skill. It has become a non-negotiable skill with most of the employers, and rightly so. Even if one acquires a good job without this skill, the danger of losing it any day or not making much progress in it, always looms large. These aspects of Competency in English should be extensively advertised especially through Campus Counseling. It is said that 9/10<sup>th</sup> of education is encouragement. Then why not encourage and motivate the students every possible way.

**Need for tailor-made Curriculum for EFE:** The need for a proper curriculum for any training program can never be over-emphasized. In this case, we must identify the specific needs of various categories of students. We should take a holistic view and pragmatic approach on the subject. For instance, what should be taught to a BE student, who somehow could not learn to speak in English in his school days, will be a totally different from the curriculum for semi-skilled worker who needs a handful of English expressions related to his job. To put it succinctly, there should be need-based curriculum for different learners.

**Ensure Meticulous Implementation:** No matter how perfect a curriculum may be, at the end of the day, it is the implementation which matters a great deal. And yet, the implementation is taken for granted. A case in point is the introduction of a well-thought-of Soft Skills Subject for Engineering students. Rarely, if ever, you will find an Engineering College appointing a Soft Skills-trained teacher. And, to cap it all, the reasons given for this audacity are that "Soft Skills is not a written paper" (only Term work) and the "students are not keen to learn it." Strange, but true. Curriculum for Competency in English for Employability (EFE) cannot be all the more allowed to go this way; let only trained teachers conduct it under strict monitoring.

#### **Conclusion**

India is a large country with more than a million people. Parliament has recognized English as an official language in India in addition to Hindi. English has been declared as an official language of the Corporate World in India. National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has accepted English as a key skill for Employability. There is no dearth of Education Institutions in India. And yet, India is virtually an English- illiterate nation where an overwhelming majority of job-aspirants are not able to communicate in English, and it directly, indirectly hampers their chances of employment and/or career growth.

To conclude, it is high time we realize the importance of competency in English as a key skill for Employability and vigorously pursue a road map to achieve it at the earliest. The Mission English for Employability (EFE) is worth all the endeavors and all the expenditure. It has the potential to change the economic map of India for the better.

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