

# English for Specific Academic Purposes: Relevance to and Impact on Employment Needs

Kalpesh V Gohil

Assistant Professor, C P Patel & F H Shah Commerce College, Anand, Gujarat (India)

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### \*Corresponding Author

Email: kalpeshgohil10[at]gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

English language education should and does empower a person to face the challenges that a modern competitive world proposes and it is expected that a person who has English language skills by his or her side will become better employable than those who are not. English language education and employment are thus interrelated. This, in any way, does not certify that a person with a certain educational degree will get a desired job in the globalized workplace scenario. This research paper tries to establish that the learning and acquisition of necessary English language skills would help students to make themselves employable in this rapidly changing employment scenario.

## 1. Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been considered as a century of knowledge and has created many opportunities of livelihood for job aspirants. At the same time it should be noted that merely passing some examination from any educational body makes no significant difference simply due to fierce competition. We as a country have been facing the threats of population explosion and high level of employment and it is a no secret to us that a number of educated youngsters in India do not get deserved and healthy employment even after completing a postgraduate degree in their respective field of study. Moreover, it has become a routine that we read news items that thousands of applicants apply for a limited vacancy in government departments and private sectors.

'Employability' is a key issue and employers have started giving considerable attention to employability. This state has come up due to rising level of unemployment. Students aiming at a well paid job are required to go through litmus test of present time: Becoming Employable. The globalized job market in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is highly sensitive to the keyword 'employability' and, therefore, our students need both subject knowledge and skills that a modern workplace expects.

The global employment market needs employees who have the ability to use communication skills in English language which is of paramount importance. Over the period of time English has manifested itself into varieties such as British English, American English, Australian English, Indian English, and African English etc. India has also embraced this foreign language and found its strong role in both education and economy alike. Our students have to have English as a tool by their side as globalization has changed the ways in which recruitments take place. Needless to say that students lacking proficiency in English is considered to be a warrior without any armour!

## 2. English and Employability

With the technological developments in the modern world, the interchange of knowledge has turned out to be a vital

concern. Traditionally, the technologically advanced countries disseminate information on a large scale and so gain presence among countries where English is used as FL or SL. All these factors give English language a pivotal role to play in the employment market in a global economy. For, it is necessary in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform job related functions.

A legitimate question that requires urgent answer through extensive research is whether the teaching and learning of English language makes students competent enough to face and tackle employment related tasks or not at the end of their Bachelor's Degree Programme.

It has been observed that General English, mistakenly called Compulsory English, has been registering a gradual shift of emphasis from grammar and composition to specific registers, grammar and composition. A careful consideration of the syllabi used on these courses indicates overemphasis on reading comprehension and writing to the detriment of listening and speaking. This is taken primarily as a reason for graduates passing out of the portals of universities failing miserably in job interviews thereafter except in case of these who have a better learning environment due to cosmopolitan setting.

The syllabi have no provision for the development of listening skills in general and active listening and presentation skills in particular. Since English is FL/SL for us, depending on the programmes concerned, we have a very little option but to master all the English language skills. Usually, the syllabi emphasize reading and writing over listening and speaking. However, the shift in overall focus towards English language has made it inevitable for the students to learn four language skills, i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing. The learning of all these skills is believed to be necessary for the students to get a competitive edge globally through proficiency in English.

Our emphasis on it as a library language [NPE, 1968; NPE 1986; Revised NEP 1992] has been proved to be disastrous, more so because even countries like France, Germany, China, Japan etc which relegated English to a position of last option,

have to train their future workforce in English. We compete with China on computer technology in terms of both hardware and software, and we stand to lose if we continue with our indifference to, or worst still, opposition to English.

The former Chief Minister of Gujarat and the present Prime Minister of India Mr Narendra Modi has opened newer avenues for students to learn English with a cautionary approach: '*angreji no abhav pan nahi, ane prabhav pan nahi.*' In other words, he expects us to equip ourselves in English without allowing ourselves to be influenced by it. We need to get right our teaching and learning environment by training our students in various employability skills i.e., Presentation, Resume Writing, Negotiation, Interview skills etc. English has become a necessity rather than an option in moving academic setting to register oriented specific language for different areas. English is no more 'English for the exam', but it has become 'the English for the exam'.

When we talk about the currently prescribed syllabi taught at University level, it is obvious that students are taught 'English for the exam' and thus find themselves in no man's land when they face job interviews. The business world expects and demands graduates not only to speak English, but also to be conversant in job related skills. Globalization has thrown new job opportunities with multinational companies setting up ventures in countries other than the native ones where they are located. The possibilities of work in multinational and multicultural environments require a specific set of skills including intercultural skills, internationally accepted etiquettes and job related registers and all this in English.

For, a world language like English is understood in business, inter-industry etc. It is no longer restricted to the public sector units but has come increasing to shape business in the private sector. Moreover, a majority of self-financing institutes thrive on using English as the medium of instruction. The ability to use English language effectively in intra-workplace and inter-workplace situations is given more importance by an employer when recruiting a candidate in any organization.

A good look at what is happening in the job market would give us a better perspective. University graduates, on an average, fail to the crucial test in the competitive job market because they lack linguistic, language-related and extra linguistic skills which are vital for them to succeed. Gainful employment has become a distant dream for our graduates. This underscores the fact that English should not only be treated as one of the core subjects but also be made a tool in their hands to handle situations that make English language skills unavoidable.

Additionally, English should be presented in relevant contexts to make the learners acquainted with particular ways in which the language functions as well as the tasks they will need to perform in their fields of specialization using various notions and functions in English language. This can be done through literary texts also. As students are supposed to study literary text they get exposure to the English language and vocabulary used in it. Needless to say students don't focus on

language and vocabulary. They are more concerned about their marks in that particular component. However, this love for literature of students can be utilized to develop their English language proficiency skills.

This research paper focuses on addressing the issues mentioned above. This research would try to resolve the following issues: What an average graduate lacks when it comes to English language proficiency in a rapidly changing employment market? How can the students be trained specifically in registers in their area or subject? How can listening and speaking skills in English be prioritized to make students interested in learning them? How can we modify our syllabi to prepare students for presentations skills and job interviews? How can methodology of teaching the syllabi be fine-tuned to meet the current market needs?

#### ***Students should specifically be trained in registers in their area / subject.***

On the global front students should be well versed in grammar, composition as well as specific registers. Heavy emphasis only on grammar and composition would do no good to students as it limits students' reach to the skill-set required by the globalized workplace of 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is time to understand that students need to be trained in registers in their subject they study as it would enhance their employability across employment sectors.

#### ***Students should be made aware about the significance of active listening and speaking for better career prospects.***

Students' indifference towards developing active listening and speaking during the process of learning of English language is responsible for their miserable performance in job interviews. Our syllabi and teaching methods heavily tilt toward reading and writing skills and eventually it has produced disastrous results as our students have developed disliking for listening and speaking skills. Lack of proper training in listening and speaking skills has contributed to the unemployment of students.

#### ***Students' training in contextual language and vocabulary through literary text.***

Literature is an efficient tool to create language awareness among students and to make language learning process efficient as they are exposed to literature study. Literature study has always been a reliable and interesting tool to make students learn contextual language. Literary texts also introduce students to a wide range of vocabulary and thus shape English language skills which would in turn make them employable.

#### ***Fine-tuning of the methodology to suit the current market needs.***

The methodology in vogue has little provision to meet the needs of students and recruiters. Thus, it needs to be redesigned. Lecture method is not enough and out dated to mould students into 'employable' category. We must accept the fact that the lecture method in 21<sup>st</sup> century education stands at cross-roads where it is identified as out-dated as it doesn't offer ample opportunities to a teacher to facilitate the challenges and

opportunities that modern students bring to the classroom. With a passage of time, the wide spread globalization has changed the needs of students in different streams they are studying in. Needless to say that this globalized world has posed many technological challenges to the English language education along with other disciplines of life. Therefore, it becomes of prime importance for teachers of English to reinvent the appropriate methods and techniques in order to keep the students' interest intact in the learning process. With the changing perceptions of English language teachers need to adopt and adapt to newer ways to accommodate the needs and expectations of modern learners.

#### **Preparing students for presentation skills and job interviews.**

The ultimate goal of learning English language at university level is to get better career prospects by performing well in job interviews. It has been observed that students often fail to give a competent performance in job interviews due to their lack of ability to use English language effectively. Students should be provided with training in English language skills so that they can enhance their ability by empowering their presentation skills and by putting up a competent performance in job interviews.

#### **Assessment of students' performance in listening and speaking through structured tests.**

Assessment of students' listening and speaking skills would give us a clearer insight for modifying syllabi as per students' needs. The English language education that gets

done at present needs to have potential to answer the challenges and requirements that a modern workplace demands in terms of students' ability to use English language. This demands students' training in all the four skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Our syllabi and methodologies focus more on reading and writing skills neglecting listening and speaking skills. Moreover, we need to develop structured tests and need to assess students' performance in listening and speaking skills as it, in turn, would help us shape and develop syllabi. This would make students employable across sectors.

### **3. Conclusion**

We need to shift emphasis from reading comprehension and writing skills to listening and speaking skills as it would make students more competitive in their occupational and educational roles. The active learning of listening and speaking skills would equip students to adjust their linguistic behavior to new situations or new roles. Literary texts in English can play a crucial role in the process of enriching their English language proficiency skills. Students need to develop the required skills to face job interviews successfully. Fine-tuning the methodology as per job requirements is the need of an hour and we cannot afford to neglect the management of teaching methods to suit the needs and demands of English language related skills by the globalized job market.

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