



A roadmap of short-term proficiency courses in English at undergraduate level

Kalpesh V Gohil

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

Abstract

The rise and spread of English in India has been remarkable in last couple of decades. This development is the result of globalization, liberalization and privatization. English has strengthened its position in variety of sectors as it has almost established itself as a lingua franca of the world business, international trade etc. English language has assumed importance even countries like India that were formerly British colonies before they got independence. There is no scope for debate on the importance and role of English language in 21st century as it is a hope to millions of youth adding to their employability. Moreover, English language has been instrumental in uplifting the financial conditions by giving them access to the job market in various employment sectors. This research paper focuses on the need and importance of English language short-term courses at undergraduate level to prepare students to face the challenges that they may face at workplace as this would ensure their smooth transition from learners to professionals.

Keywords: Short-terms courses, Proficiency in English, Undergraduate level

1. Introduction

Needless to say that English has opened for us a bundle of opportunities. Despite this, there is a major portion of students found lacking in English language skills and thus unable to gain volume in their performance. The major barrier to development of self-confidence is a lack of communication and work-related skills. It is difficult to say whether or not the academic training and teaching methods and strategies adopted by teachers create opportunities for students to get exposure to all the four language skills. Our students need comprehensive training in all the four language skills to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in English. It seems we have overlooked the fact that proficiency in English provides us an opportunity to access to valuable frontiers of rapidly growing knowledge and employment. English is not only a tool to gain desired employment but it is also a key to one's social upliftment and financial freedom. Nandan Nilekani (2008) ^[6] describes this phenomenon and says, "English is emerging as the language of aspiration of the Indian population- as a passport to lucrative job and entry into the country's growing middle class".

The context of employment helps us understand the need and importance of English language proficiency better. Proficiency in English language has so far either been missing or not given due attention. There is a strong interlink between language skills and employability. The development of this interrelationship can be achieved only if the gap between English language skills and employability is plugged with a course that meets the needs and demands of students' language and workplace skills. This research papers focuses on what it takes to develop a short term proficiency course in English so that students' language proficiency help them attract gainful employment.

Globalization and privatization has changed the job market drastically as these two forces have necessitated the development of professional skills-sets. English language and work-related skills ensure job security and a great extent

generate new growth opportunities at both national and international level. Managers of this modern business world have no time to train freshly recruited employees. On the other hand they believe in hiring people who possess work-related skills already and who can adapt and adjust to new challenges, people at work and perform effectively and efficiently simultaneously.

The nation have been discussing that we have the potential to be a superpower and this can be achieved through English language which can be a great tool to us to realize our vision of India as the superpower. The world of 21st century has been considered as a global village where activities of people are interrelated and interdependent. It would be no exaggeration to say that English launches its proficient users to global outlook through exposure at local and national level.

We, Indians, are uniquely positioned to tap into English advantage provided our youth demonstrate their skills for maximum career growth. It is believed that English is no more a language of few but has been become an inevitable language for increasing employability of our student population. English has created many opportunities for growth and development for our students at national and global levels. However, our students remain deprived of these opportunities due to insufficient language proficiency. It appears that students possess efficiency on various fronts but they cannot attain the gainful employment as they miss out opportunities to highlight their skills through the medium of English.

This research paper focuses on the need and importance of English language short-term courses at undergraduate level to prepare students to face the challenges that they may face at workplace as this would ensure their smooth transition from learners to professionals. Though such short-term courses seem feasible, we need to diagnose with utmost care the loopholes in students' communicative English language learning ability, management of teaching English to them and devise strategies to develop these courses result-

oriented.

This research paper attempts to define how we can develop, structure short-term courses for the development of English language competence in students. It is widely accepted fact that students do not attain satisfactorily level of language proficiency, even after completion of their undergraduate studies. It should be understood that there is a need to develop a course which can make undergraduate students competitive and can enable them to exploit the opportunities available locally and on global fronts through the medium of English.

The current core courses studied by students at undergraduate level do not have any provision or scope for English language enrichment and this lack of skills force them to accept semi-standard designation across employment sector. It becomes necessary for students to know industry requirements due to this gap between skills. It has been observed that many employers get disappointed during campus placement or interviews as candidates do not match their expectations when they do not find any relevant skills in candidates. This state is a result of non-availability of student-centric course to bridge what they do not know and what they are expected to know. We cannot afford to neglect students' needs and it is the time that course designers, developers and/or implementers need to respond to the needs of students as students act as major stakeholders in learning. Respective government has invested in the education of students and now it is course designers and implementers who are accountable for the kind of outcome that decides students' performance and employment opportunities.

This research paper aims at defining comprehensive and career-oriented courses which are interactive in nature and puts the needs of students on the top of the priority list. Moreover, these courses can be conceptualized only after taking employers' expectations and teachers' feedback into consideration. Listening and speaking skills get no volume in the syllabi in general and active listening and presentation skills in particular. As English has been considered as a foreign or second language for us, depending on the programmes concerned, we have no option but to train our students in all the four skills in English language.

Short-term courses can be integrated into formal framework of undergraduate studies which would enable students to the level of competence in English the modern world of employment demands. We need short-term proficiency courses for one more reason that our students fail to impress employers about their potential and skills through the medium of English. Though students possess good domain knowledge, they are not able to express the same and convince the employers in an interview in English. There cannot be any debate or second opinion on the fact that English is a passport for any well-paid and professional job. Globalization has changed the world we used to live in. Business houses have started setting up ventures in countries other than the native countries where they run their business. This has realized a state of multinational and multicultural work scenario and students need a specific set of skills, internationally accepted etiquettes and job-related registers. Students need all these skills demonstrated in their use of English. Various multinational companies have got attracted to English language skills and have made investments in India and have created many direct and indirect jobs, which would contribute to the growth of the

nation as well. This statement is corroborated By Nandan Nilekani (2008.324) ^[6] in his book *Imaging India* in the following words,

The tide of new private sector jobs took off with the IT sector, which together with the BPO industry has created 1.6 million new jobs over the last two decades. The IT and BPO jobs have helped trigger a vibrant domestic economy particularly since 2003, and a growing tide of jobs across industries.

2. Short-term courses

The nature of short-term courses is intensive and holistic as it takes the current situation into consideration and that demands language-wise adept candidates who are to be inducted into various jobs. These short-term courses are meant to provide language alignment to students before they take up any profession and these courses prove to be a morale booster for students.

This research paper is strongly based on the belief that students have to have language competency for a better career growth. It is unfortunate to note that hundreds of students acquire degrees from various disciplines of study but they possess minimal or nearly no English language usage skills which, in turn, minimize their chances of getting a healthy and desired employment on global fronts. In order to secure a professional safe mode position, students need to be proficient in their domain knowledge supplemented by English language skills.

In a CII Gen Next Workforce Summit 2013 held in New Delhi, Dr Shashi Tharoor, the former minister of state for human resource development, said that,

By 2020, 64% of our population will be of a working age. We can only leverage this talent pool if we educate and train this pool to take advantage of the opportunities of the 21st century.

2.1 Let us discuss what it takes to realize a short-term proficiency course in English.

1. Needs analyses of students

Needs analyses give us a fair understanding of students' current needs and expectations from English language courses. There is no exaggeration when we say needs analysis checks the pulse of the current scenario which can act as a GPS in locating the current destination. Here the word destination is used for actual learner needs. It is high time that we should respond to the students needs and cannot afford to neglect this dimension of needs analyses while designing a course for students. Any course designed in isolation would not achieve its course. On the contrary, it only defeats the very purpose of the course. For example, marketing thrives on identifying customers needs and wants and attains its goals with satisfying customers through a coordinated set of activities.

As per marketing perspective needs analysis means customer oriented planning and operations and in the same way we should also approach to needs analysis over tailor-made courses to gauge students' requirements and satisfaction. Any course which is not based on needs analyses would not achieve cent percent of its set goals. Courses designed without taking students needs into consideration may straight jacket their potentials and skills making them vulnerable to unemployment. Therefore, it is given that any course should be founded on needs analyses

to make it a success.

2. Employers' needs and their feedback

Short-term courses would give considerable significance to employers' needs as they play an important role in the selection procedure of a candidate. As discussed earlier, globalization has changed the ways of business which also gets reflected in the selection process of a candidate. There are several layers of interview which thoroughly test candidate's calibre. With the changing times employers are setting new standards, parameters and benchmarks to select the best candidate.

Needless to say, this scenario demands students who have excellent English language skills to pass all the phases of a selection procedure. Therefore, the short-term courses should fulfil the expectations of potential employers. The present scenario says that students are not able to reach to the level of proficiency that employers need and expect from them. Though they have degree, they are incompetent language-wise. Moreover, regular feedback from the employers on the employed candidates would also give important insights into the inclusion of necessary modules in the short-term courses.

3. Integrated training of all the four language skills

Any short-term courses need to be based on the comprehensive training in English. It should be understood that no single skill would make students competent in English as every language skills has a specific role and goal to achieve which ultimately contribute to students' English language proficiency. Students' healthy career can only be built on these four pillars. Technological advancements have increased interaction with people residing in different cities, states and countries and this interaction is both communicative and written. Such comprehensive training in all the four skills would help plug loopholes in the effectiveness of the short-term courses.

4. Experience through field-work

Experience through field-work would prove to be huge source of learning and an eye-opener for the enrolled students as they would have direct experience and exposure to various government and private academic institutes. This would make them realize the importance of English language skills with ground realities and this is how they would have preview of the professional challenges which they will face once employed. In such courses students are supposed to prepare a report on widespread use of English language and this would fetch them some insight into its present and future usefulness and its command in getting employment.

Needless to say that field-work would give them exposure to communication with variety of people and this, in turn, would help them locate their own shortcomings in English. Such realizations would motivate students to work constructively in developing their language skills well before they get into a profession of their choice. All in all, field-work would help students understand the presence and significance of English language.

5. Teachers' needs analyses and their feedback on students' expectations on English language courses

The design of short-term courses can be done in a failure-proof fashion with the assistance, coordination and valuable

insights from teachers. As teachers are in the best position to observe students with close quarters they gain critical understanding of students' tendencies, aspirations, outlook and motivating factors. Teachers' feedback can shape these short-term courses well as their feedback would be loaded with reflection of students' opinion and expectations from English language courses. We cannot separate teachers from course designing. Teachers play a vital role in designing and developing such courses.

Teachers are in a better position to suggest necessary changes, inclusions, exclusions in short-term courses as they do interact with students and observe their progress on a daily basis. Designing of balanced short-term courses needs teachers' active contribution in the process otherwise without teachers' active indulgence in the process these courses would prove lop-sided. The balanced courses are such which encompass the necessary aspects of language skills for students' overall development.

6. Annual upgradation of syllabi

The world around us develops rapidly in every walk of life where everything is transitory. We need to upgrade syllabi annually to stay relevant and keep pace with the developments of the world around us. We need to include what is necessary and exclude what is not relevant now. An upgraded syllabus is the key to the training of a responsible and competitive generation. This can be understood by the following lines by Diana-Man Lau (2010)^[1] (*Analyzing the Curriculum Development Process: Three Models, University of Macau, Macau*):

In the age of flexibility and change, it is institution of education which remains out-dated sector. What is advocated and followed in the modernist curriculum cannot prepare students to survive and further develop in the postmodernist era.

The world keeps changing every day and the IT revolution and increasing number of MNCs in India have redefined their expectations from higher education. In this scenario of change the prescribed syllabi cannot be continued for more than couple of months as new ideas, inventions, developments and research prompt it to change. Needless to say that upgradation of syllabi is in students' interest as it enables them to access recent knowledge which would help them to be competitive at both national and international levels.

3. Conclusion

Our students have potential to exhibit their skills on global fronts provided they get appropriate and relevant training in English language skills. Therefore, we need to have short-term courses in English which would make sure that no talent would go waste. This is the era of rapid change and we cannot afford to lag behind in the process if our students to become competent internationally.

4. References

1. Chang-Man Lau Diana, *Analyzing the Curriculum Development Process Three Models*, University of Macau, Macau (Online), 2010.
2. Dubin Fraida, *Elite Olshtain, Course Design*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
3. Dudley-Evans T. Maggie Jo St John, *Developments in*

- English for Specific Purposes A multidisciplinary Approach, 14th ed, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011.
4. ICMR, Marketing Management, May, 2004. Ref. no. MM-052k425
 5. Littlewood, William, Communicative Language Teaching, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009.
 6. Nandan Nilekani, Imaging India, Allen Lane, Penguin India, 2008.
 7. Nunan David, Syllabus Design, Oxford University Press, 1988.
 8. Nunan David, the Learner Centred Curriculum, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.
 9. Wheeler DK. Curriculum Process, London: University of London Press, 1967.
 10. Yalden, Janice, Principles of Course Design for Language Teaching, Cambridge University Press, USA, 1989.