Effectiveness of the Prescribed English Language Foundation Course on Communication and Soft Skills as per UGC-CBCS

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Abstract

Language learning is interlinked with a wide range of skills and consequently innumerable benefits too. Command over language makes one articulate with self-confidence. It is possible to link language learning to imparting language and life skills by
using quotes and excerpts from various genres with the objective of facilitate the learner to
develop his/her social, emotional and cognitive skills such as the ability to communicate
effectively, improve interpersonal relations, develop positive attitude, be empathetic and
think logically and creatively.

The objective of this research paper is to analyse the effectiveness of Skill Pro, ‘A
Foundation Course on Communication and Soft Skills’ which was prescribed for
Undergraduate B.A., B.Com and B.Sc. courses of Degree Colleges in Andhra Pradesh as per
UGC-Choice Based Credit System. The main purpose is to examine the material of the
prescribed Foundation Course and how far it will be useful for learners to enhance their
Communication and Life Skills. And also this paper focuses on how language skills along
with life skills can be learnt effectively by the learners at the classroom level for proper
utilization by them in their real life situations. This research paper attempts to answer the
following questions:

- First, is there a gap between the present English language syllabi in degree colleges
  and students' academic and professional needs?
- Second, is there a need to modify and revise the present prescribed Foundation Course
  material, so that it meets the students’ needs to apply in their real life situation?

Keywords: Communication Skills, Soft Skills and Choice Based Credit System.

Introduction

Human beings have the ability to speak and communicate which separates them from
the animals. Human beings, with effective communication skills, interacts one another as a
social being. Mere having educational qualifications and academic merits not enough for a
person to progress well in society but the effective communication skills make him to achieve
what he wants to become in the global market. Apart from the communication skills, students also need to possess soft skills. Because, communication skills help the students to get an interview, whereas soft skills make them to get the job and help them to become successful in their both personal and professional life. Apart from the knowledge in the fields of subject and technology, the forthcoming decades demand the need for a holistic skill-set attitude and positive personality in several fields.

Recommendations of National Knowledge Commission:

To ensure quality, NKC has called for reform of existing universities to ensure frequent curricula revisions, introduction of course credit system, enhancing reliance on internal assessment, encouraging research, and reforming governance of institutions.

In this regard, University Grants Commission (UGC), India, has brought out guidelines for the introduction of the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in higher educational institutions for Graduate, Postgraduate, Diploma and Certificate Programmes. The expressive stated purposes of the introduction of the scheme are mainly to provide opportunity for students to have a choice of courses or subjects within a programme resembling an à la carte menu as against the mostly fixed set of subjects now being offered except for the limited choice of electives in professional degrees and postgraduate programmes with the flexibility to complete the programme by earning the required number of credits at a pace decided by the students.

In this connection, based on the guidelines of National Knowledge Commission, University Grants Commission has come up with the new Curriculum, i.e. Choice Based Credit System for all Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses. As an effective part of CBCS new Curriculum, Foundation Courses were introduced for undergraduates of B.A., B.Com and B.Sc. course learners to enhance their Communication skills and Soft skills and to prepare students in required basic skills and values in diverse area. The objective of the
Foundation Course is to create awareness among students and train them in the skills of the course concerned. Keeping the need in mind, the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education designed syllabus for the Foundation Course, i.e., Skill Pro- “Communication Skills and Soft Skills” for II, III & IV semester B.A., B.Com and B.Sc. Degree college students to impart various skills to the students to make them employable citizens with better human personalities. It was introduced in 2015-2016 academic year in all the degree colleges of Andhra Pradesh State.

The course helps the student hone their four skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing and also initiates them into the fifth skill, "thinking," in English. The learner-friendly material and the task-based activities enhance their communicative competence. The course focuses on all the four areas of knowledge and skill that constitute Communicative Competence: Linguistic/Grammatical Competence, Sociolinguistic Competence, Discourse Competence, and Strategic Competence. It also aims at equipping the student with a wide range of sub-skills: understanding gist in listening; skimming and scanning in reading; pronunciation and intonation, fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness in speaking; and organizational and editing skills in writing. In addition, the course helps the student acquire knowledge of soft skills. Thus the three-semester course helps the learner in their personal life as well as their professional life. The efficacy of the course largely depends on continuous and consistent practice by the students inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, the designed content and the modules thereof provide ample scope for activity based learning.

Definition of Communication Skills:

Different books and experts define the Communication Skills differently but the most definition is that: Communication Skill is the art and technique of communicating by using oral or body language to persuade him or bring him the change that you want him to be. It is
the process by which information is transmitted and understood between two or more people. The word itself is derived from the Latin verb, ‘Communicare’, which means “to share” or “to make common”.

Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols & signs of behaviour. - Webster’s Dictionary

Communication is interchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing or signs. - Robert Anderson

Thus, Communication Skills are the attributes to use language and express information. These are the set of skills that enables a person to communicate information so that the listener can receive and understood. Communication Skills refer to the behaviours that serve to convey the information. It is an ability which can be displayed in consistently and effectively by the individuals both their professional and personal world.

Definition of Soft Skills:

Soft Skills are personal attributes that support situational awareness and enhances an individual ability to get a job done. The term Soft Skills is often used as a synonym for People skills or Emotional Intelligence. Unlike hard skills, which describe a person’s technical ability to perform a specifically defined task, Soft Skills are broadly appreciable across job titles and industries. It’s often said that while hard skills might get someone an interview, soft skills will help that person get and keep the job.

Soft Skills, a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills.

According to the Collins Dictionary, the term “Soft Skills” is “desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include
common sense, the ability to deal with people, and positive flexible attitude”. Soft Skills are a cluster of productive personality traits that characterize one’s relationships in his social environment. National Business Education Association deems Soft Skills as critical for being industrious today’s workplace. Soft skills complement hard skills also known as technical skills, for productive workplace performance and everyday life competencies. (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007)

In the 21st century, Soft skills are a major differentiator, a sine qua non for employability and success in life. A study conducted by Harvard University noted that 80% achievements in career are determined by Soft skills and 20% by hard skills. A public interest study conducted by Mc Donald in UK predicted over a half a million people will be held back from job sectors by 2020 due to lack of Soft skills. Experts say that Soft skills training should begin for a person when they are students, to perform efficiently in their academic environment as well as in their future workplace.

Different type of Soft Skills:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Adaptability
- Problem-Solving
- Creativity
- Work Ethic
- Interpersonal Skills

Communication is the act of transferring information from one place to another. This can be in numerous forms including verbally, written (e.g. using printed or digital media), visually (e.g. utilizing charts or graphs) or non-verbally (e.g. using body language).
Effective communication skills are the abilities, which help you to express yourself clearly and concisely, in a way that things are understood and done. A person with good Communication skills can read people’s behaviour, compromise to reach an agreement, avoid and resolve conflict, adapt to new and different situations.

In today’s world, as we deeply rely on information sharing, strong communication skills are considered as an essential life skills. Whether it is getting elected as a President of a college club or about getting your dream job, it will always help you to move close to your goals and aspirations. Good communicators can explain their thoughts and ideas to others in ways that make sense and are easy to understand. You will be able to communicate with your supervisor what you need to do your job well and also you will be able to communicate with your team to make sure that you are all working together towards completion of your group project at college or organisation. If you are in business, your communication skills can make the difference between a satisfied customer and an angry one.

Themes:

Skill Pro, ‘A Foundation Course on Communication Skills and Soft Skills’ approaches issues like competencies in language, pronunciation skills, and conversational skills with reference to Debates, Role-Plays, Presentation skills, Group-Discussions and Interview skills. The Books or Course material also focuses both Intrapersonal skills (Positive thinking, SWOT/SWOC, Emotional Intelligence) and Interpersonal skills (Netiquettes) and Verbal (Paragraph writing) and Non-Verbal (Body Language). Thus, the course makes students employability ready as it covers the most useful topics to enhance their Language/Communication competencies and build a bridge between the campus and corporate. The syllabus has been designed with a view to impart both Communication skills and Soft skills among the students and make them employable citizens with better human personalities.
Organization:

In Book- I, Skill Pro (Communication Skills and Soft Skills-I), focus has been laid on communication skills and language skills. It was designed to help the learners in building Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening and Reading skills by providing enough exercises at different levels and expected the learners to gain competence in choosing appropriate words and constructing error free sentences. Vocabulary is considered the key to communication and it plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language. The first unit, therefore, is on the different aspects of vocabulary. Since English is a predicate-oriented language, there are two units on grammar focusing on the verb phrase. Listening and speaking are the two receptive skills. Listening is the basic skill of communication, and reading helps a person refine their writing skills. Unit IV and Unit V are on listening and reading respectively.

Communication skills and Soft skills were focused in the Foundation Course Book-II which was prescribed for the Third Semester students with special emphasis on Speaking skills and Conversational skills. For many learners of English, the sound-spelling relationship of the language appears an archaic. Another problem many Indian learners face is English word accent. The book contains five units; deal with the important aspects of Pronunciation and Accent, Conversation skills for everyday use and Speaking skills with reference to Debates, Role-Plays, Presentation skills, Group-Discussions and Interview skills. Unit I and Unit II help learners overcome these problems to a great extent. The remaining units are on the two productive skills, speaking and writing. The techniques of day-to-day conversations and the important characteristics of interviews and GDs presented in this course strengthen the learner's speaking skills. The last unit presents various aspects of presentation in writing.

In the Fourth Semester, the course is aimed to impart vital skills to the students’ success that can be the winning edge and lead to really dramatic result in their overall performance. A current axiom is that hard skills will get a person an interview, but soft skills
will get that person the job. Unit I of the course is on soft skills, which are absolutely necessary in the global job market. Writing is considered the most difficult of all the skills. Units II to V help the learner improve their writing skills, especially academic/formal writing. Thus the course provides both Intrapersonal and Interpersonal skills and makes the learners readiness to get a job and excel in his professional career in the Global market.

Skill Pro- A Foundation Course on Communication Skills and Soft Skills: An Effective Learning Experience:

The Foundation Course, ‘Communication Skills and Soft Skills’ has a systematic structure that builds up communicative ability and soft skills progressively spreads over the II, III & IV Semesters of the Undergraduate B.A., B.Com, and B.Sc. course learners. It will enable the learners to develop their competencies both in Language/Communication and Soft skills. This course emphasizes on LSRW skills which will make learners to be employable by providing enough exercises at different levels. And also it approaches the study of important aspects; Pronunciation skills, Conversation skills for daily use and speaking skills and writing skills with reference to different activities at the classroom level where learners are actively participated and learned.

The course material has been designed with a view to enable learners in building competencies in the fields of language and life skills that are necessary to deal effectively with the challenges of life. The themes explored in the course, Communication skills and Soft skills are people and places, personality and lifestyle, media and environment and Work and Business, Technology and Society which are all general and related to one’s own life. So, the course is designed for all learners and to make them employable citizens with better human personalities.

The study closes by stating that the activity based course material for English integrating both Communication skills and Soft skills is better than context based and
literature oriented texts. Activities like Role-plays, Debates, JAM sessions and Group-Discussions build up experience and self-confidence with handling the situation in real life. The course provides different activities to develop both Intrapersonal and Interpersonal skills which help the learners in developing their Positive attitude. It also abridges the communication gap within the organization and amongst the individual.

It is further felt that students of Undergraduates, who as future professionals need to acquire/ develop both Communication skills and Soft skills to get a job and handle well in the global world. This course makes the learners employability ready as it covers most useful topics that will build a bridge between the campus and corporate.

Thus, the University Grants Commission introduced the new CBCS Curriculum to change the teaching learning system as student centred from teacher centred. As, per the guidelines of CBCS, the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education has designed the syllabus of the Foundation course, ‘Communication Skills and Soft skills’ with a view to impart various skills to the students to make them employable citizens with better human personalities. This is possible through the UGC-CBCS curriculum where the learners are given due importance or opportunities. Thus, introducing this Foundation course, ‘Communication skills and Soft skills’ is very useful for the learners as it gives scope for Presentations, Role-play, Group-Discussions and overall development and bringing in the necessary change in English Language Learning and Teaching system.

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