Research Paper Management

A Study of Task Based Teaching Methodology and its Impact on Employability Skills of Learners

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ABSTRACT

Along with good academic record, the corporate world also looks for 'Employability Skills' in a job aspirant. Despite the fact that the universities are churning out lakhs of graduates every year yet the feedback from the Industry regarding the 'Employability Skills' of these job aspirants is quite discouraging.The reason being that all technical and management colleges are characterized by diversity. Students come from different geographical and varied academic backgrounds and hence there is no uniformity in the skill sets that they possess when they take admission in these professional courses. Institutes need to develop the Employability skills of the students in order to make them job ready. | Employability skills also referred as Soft Skills or Transferable Skills are not job specific but they are skills that serve across all jobs in the industry. Communication skills, both oral and written, presentation skills, team work, time management skills, leadership skills, problem solving, critical thinking, analytical ability are some of the important employability skills. The institutions can play a significant role in developing these skills by effectively incorporating them into regular teaching. | This paper aims to identify the important employability skills required by graduates, specifically in India, to be successful at their work place. It also tries to find out how a shift in teaching pedagogy from the lecture method to task based method would help students enhance these employability skills. A study of a pilot group of 50 students was undertaken to find out if the 'Task based approach' of teaching would develop the required skills and in turn, help the students perform better in their work environments. Measures have also been suggested to Institutes, curriculum designers and faculty members for successful implementation of task based teaching pedagogy in enhancing the Employability skills of the students. |

KEYWORDS Employability Skills, Transferable Skills, Corporate world, Task Based Method, Communication Skills, Job aspirants.

Introduction:

"Corporate India has two major concerns first to hire good employees and secondly to train them" says Assocham, Secretary General Mr. D.S.Rawat. He adds, "Soft skills learned by students during their university education help them to learn the trade efficiently by using their technical abilities as a part of a team, to understand conflict as a means for discussion instead of an angry confrontation, and to respect difference as a creative opportunity rather than an obstacle."

A National Employability Study conducted by Aspiring Minds reveals that the current talent pool of technical graduates has a very low employability ratio. According to a NASSCOM report, each year over 3 million graduates and post-graduates are added to the Indian workforce but not even one fourth of them are employable.

Statement of the Problem:

The focus of this study is to investigate how task based teaching is more beneficial than lecture based teaching. Our research examines ways to develop Employability skills by altering the teaching pedagogy. It is our firm belief that changing the teaching pedagogy can gradually help to hone the employability skills of students.

Our interest in the topic arose from our experiences in our college. In various technical and management colleges, students are given practice in group discussions and interview skills. They are also engaged in various activities to foster their confidence and to improve their communication skills. Yet the managers are not satisfied with the fresh graduates and feel that they lack employability skills.

Review of Literature:

The review of literature suggests rapidly growing interest amongst teachers in task based method of teaching and expected increase in employability skills.

The ACCI (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry) has defined Employability skills as skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

Soft skills also called Transferable skills, Employability skills, Generic skills or Key skills are not job specific, but are skills which serve horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs at all levels in the industry. The degree to which students develop these skills determines how well they can communicate, make presentations & reports, solve problems, function in teams, self assess, learn new knowledge and manage stress when they have to cope with changes. (Assocham Business Barometer Study; June 2009)

India is struggling not with the problem of unemployment rather with the problem of employability. The students who pass out of the educational institutions are not employable in terms of their employability skills. (Sinha G.R)

The teacher's role is to awaken and develop the potentiality and ability of students for studying; to inspire and kindle the interest of the students. The teacher should know how to go from easy to difficult stages and help in development of habits by means of a practice pattern. (TamuraE.T, 2006)

Sauvignon suggests designing the curriculum to include language arts (or language analysis activities), language-for-a-purpose (content-based) activities, personalized language use, theatre arts (including simulations, role-plays, and social interaction games), and language use "beyond the classroom" (including planning activities that take the learners outside the classroom to engage in real-world encounters). The communicative approach embraces the principle of "learning by doing." Thus, language acquisition takes place as a result of using the second language in meaningful communication from the onset in the process. (Zainuddin et al, 2011)

Hypothesis:
Task based method is successful in creating multiple opportunities to enhance Employability skills of students.

Objective of study:
1) To list the important employability skills required by engineering and management students.
2) To study how task based teaching pedagogy is able to create multiple opportunities to enhance the employability skills of students.
3) To suggest measures to stakeholders for successful implementation of task based teaching pedagogy for improving employability skills of students.

Theoretical Base:
Professor Ellis points out that methodological procedure should be followed in teaching tasks. He has proposed that any task-based activity should be given in 3 phases: The pre-task phase, the task phase and the post task phase. Rod Ellis says' "These phases reflect the chronology of a task based lesson. The first phase is the 'pre-task' and concerns the various activities that teachers and students can undertake before they undertake the task, such as whether students are given time to plan the performance of the task. The second phase, the 'during task' phase, centres around the task itself and affords various instructional options, including whether the students are required to operate under time pressure or not. The final phase is 'post-task' phase and involves procedures for following up on task performance." According to Prof Ellis only the during-task phase is obligatory in task-based teaching. He adds, "Minimally, a task-based lesson consists of the students just performing a task. Options selected from the 'pre-task' or 'post-task' phases are non-obligatory but can serve a crucial role in ensuring that the task performance is maximally effective for language development." (Ellis Rod, 2006)

Phase	Example of option
A. Pre-task	*Framing the activity (e.g. establishing the outcome of the task) *Planning time *Doing a similar task
B. During- task	*Time pressure *Number of participants
C. Post- task	*learner report *Consciousness- raising *Repeat task

Table 1: A framework for designing task- based lessons

Source: Ellis Rod, The Methodology of Task-Based Teaching

Methodological Procedure used by faculty to teach various syllabus topics:
The faculty used task based teaching method to cover some Business Communication topics such as Presentation Skills, Agenda, Minutes of the Meeting, Report Writing.

Presentation Skills (Oral and Written)
The students were given an activity related to News reading and discussion. The faculty created a blog for the section. Here student groups were supposed to upload news/ current affairs related to Marketing, Finance, Politics, International News and Sports. Members of the group had to give their opinion or an analysis of important news. They could also comment on the news uploaded by different groups. It was done on a daily basis.

As a class activity two speakers were, randomly, picked from these groups and made to talk about the contribution their team had made to the blog. This was done every week for 20 minutes at the beginning of the session till all the students got a chance to participate. This task was taken up till midterm.

The students were evaluated on the basis of oral and written presentations.

Business Proposal
The student groups were asked to discuss and think of a 'Start up business venture.' They had to prepare a 'Brochure' for their company that could be used by the marketing team. The teams were given an introductory lecture and some additional reading material on 'How to prepare a Brochure'. They were given time to do the entire activity in the class. At the end of the two sessions they gave a group presentation on their own business proposal. The blog space was used by the faculty to collect soft copies of the Business Proposal.

They were given feedback on the class presentation. The written proposal was evaluated.

Agenda, Minutes of Meeting, Report Writing
For this activity, the students had to choose a socially relevant project. They had to conduct a meeting to decide the project. The students drafted the agenda and conducted a meeting. They decided the activity in their group, carried it out in the group and prepared a project report on the entire activity. They also recorded it in the form of AV file and submitted the CD.

The students submitted a written copy of agenda; Minutes of Meeting and a Project Report and also gave a presentation of the same. They were evaluated on the oral and written work.

Result Discussion & Conclusion (Part A)

1. List of Employability Skills:
The researchers have done an analytical study of the secondary data and have compiled a list of most important employability skills.

Communication Skills	Oral Communication Written Communication Fluency in second language
Presentation Skills	Oral Presentation Written Presentation
Team work	Interpersonal skills. Ability to manage others Conflict management
Leadership Skills	Delegating
Time Management	Coping with multiple tasks
Creativity	Imagination
Adaptability	Flexibility
Entrepreneurship	Decision making Taking responsibility Planning Coordinating
Numeracy	Ability to deal with numbers
Technological Skills	Use of modern tools and techniques

Table 2: List of employability skills

Result Discussion & Conclusion (Part B)
The researcher's observations on the tasks carried out by the

faculty:

Presentation Skills
Employers seek individuals who understand the broad issues and have the capacity to learn new things. This task created opportunities for the students to build on their knowledge base. Besides learning Presentation Skills, the students also developed the habit of reading Newspaper and increased their general awareness. It considerably improved their oral presentation content.

Business Proposals
Besides learning how to write a business proposal, the task helped improve creative thinking in the students. They thought of new products and innovative product campaigns. Teamwork skills contribute to positive working relationships. The students planned their course of action, exchanged a lot of ideas and information, agreed and disagreed with each other and then came to a consensus. This helped them develop their interpersonal skills, resolve conflicts and manage other people related issues. Writing a business proposal helped improve the written communication of the students.

Agenda, Minutes of Meeting, Report Writing
The students knew the basics of writing Agenda and Minutes of Meeting. They practiced planning and conducting a meeting and learnt how to conduct themselves in a formal setting. Submitting a formal report helped strengthen their report writing skills. Submitting an AV file or a CD of the activity helped improve technology skills and reinforced the attitude of effective execution of tasks.

A Social Project was chosen as the medium to teach these components so that the students are sensitized towards their social responsibility. All the activities were completed in a given time period. Submissions were in time. This helped develop discipline and time management in students. The faculty also encouraged reflection on the work of all group members.

A tabular presentation of the tasks and the learning opportunities created:

Business Communication Topic Covered	Pre-Task Phase	Task Phase	Post task Phase	Observations about opportunities created
Presentation Skills (Oral and Written)	1. Discussion on relevance of different news items. 2. Designating blog space for News Views. 3. Reading the news and uploading it.	1. Commenting on different news items uploaded on the blog. 2. Presentation of news.	Evaluation and feedback based on comments uploaded on the blog and oral presentation given in the class.	1.Communication skills. 2. General awareness. 3.Team work
Business Proposals	1. Discussion on Business Proposals. 2. Additional reading material on how to write a business proposal.	1. Role plays and advertisement campaigns. 2.Designing a brochure	Feedback on advertisement campaign and evaluation of written proposal.	1.Creative thinking & designing ability 2.Planning 3. Team work 4.Communication Skills
Agenda, Minutes of Meeting, Report Writing	1) Agenda and Minutes of Meetings had been covered in the class. 2) Power point presentation on Report Writing was shown to students.	1. Planning & conducting a meeting. 2. Live project in community.	Feedback on group presentation and evaluation of minutes of meeting and report writing.	1.Conducting oneself in an office setting. 2. Planning, coordinating & working in a team. 3.Presentation skills. 4.Technological skills. 5.Advanced Business Communication. Time Management

Table 3: Table of tasks and learning opportunities created

Suggestions:
Change in Curriculum-The universities, in consultation with the companies, should explicitly define the skills that the graduates need at work. They should then decide how these skills can be aligned to the course content and made a part of the curriculum.

Shift in teaching pedagogy- Task based method of teaching is effective in generating opportunities. For every topic the faculty will have to plan the 3 phases of the task according to the nature of the learning outcome. The faculty should also provide pre-reading material to the students to maximize the learning.

Task based teaching methods: A suggested framework for faculties to design task based lessons to enhance Employability Skills

PRE TASK	• Framing the activity. • Defining learning outcomes. These should be defined keeping in mind the topic and the Employability Skills to be reinforced • Providing pre-reading material • Providing students the overview of the task This framework will provide an advanced organizer for the task.
DURING TASK	• Instruction to the students on how to perform the task. • Faculty acts as facilitator for successful achievement of learning outcomes.
POST TASK	• Objective evaluation. • Subjective feedback aimed at raising consciousness about learning outcomes. • Refining/ Redesigning tasks based on classroom experience.

Table 4: Suggested framework for faculties
***Refer to Table 2 on Employability Skills**

Suggestions for Stakeholders
a) For the Institutes
- Curriculum designers, Faculties and students should be sensitised about the gap that exists between the student's communication levels and the expectations of the industry from job aspirants.
- Institutes to take a policy decision to adopt 'Task-based Methodology' as a teaching pedagogy for the students to enhance employability skills.
- Faculty Development Programmes to explain the role of teaching pedagogy and how to teach through the chosen pedagogy should be provided.
- Provide additional aid in the form of infrastructure and equipments such as mikes, camera, language lab, IT facilities such as projector, Internet availability and well-equipped library for making the exercise yield better results.

b) For the Curriculum Designers
- Provide guidance for teaching through Task-based method of teaching with additional help to achieve the objective of enhancing employability skills of the students.

- Suggest reading material for the students that is customised, conversational and contemporary for Task-based methods.
- Provide, develop and recommend additional study material such as popular websites, Videos, films etc to the faculties with teaching notes to bring uniformity in teaching material.

c) For the Faculties

- Prepare session plan according to the objectives.
- Provide students with clear instructions about preparing for the topic and give them pre-reading material. The method of evaluating the conceptual knowledge along with skills should be made known to the students in advance.
- Plan and reduce time spent in speaking on the topic and provide time for student interaction to encourage more participation from the students.
- Create forums to enhance the reading and writing skills of the students since the present generation is quite tech savvy.

d) For the students

- Should commit themselves to developing their employability skills.
- Prepare for the class discussions and tasks by following the instructions given by the faculty.
- Actively participate in the class discussion by interacting as well as listening to others and utilise every opportunity to enhance skills and conceptual knowledge.

Limitations

- The researcher has focused mainly task-based teaching pedagogy even though there are other participatory methods like Case study method.
- Due to time constraint, the researcher has not studied all the disciplines of Management studies separately. If done, this would have made the research more exhaustive.
- It was not possible for the researcher to check the progress made by the students in their oral communication and hence only opportunities are being taken into consideration.

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