

Enhancement Of Placement In Engineering And Professional Courses

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Abstract: amidst all the contemporary challenges, those who are good at impressing others with their hard skills, etiquette, integrity and conduct only shall survive and succeed in any domain. Strong personality traits are the essential factors to make a long, progressive and successful career and life. Learners were not aware of these factors called life skills until the recent years, since it was not taught through school or college curriculum. However, now its importance is realized, so that the skill-based trainings are incorporated into the current academics. It is not enough if life skills remain at syllabus level, instead teaching mode and training at college level especially under graduation should also prioritize the most important social skill called interpersonal communication, which can ultimately enable successful teaching-learning and effective placement once the learner has acquired the desired skills. This paper highlights the importance of effective communication skills in classroom teaching-learning, job interviews for success, sustenance and progress in one's career and life in general. Feedback from hundred placed undergraduate students of B.E. Marine Engineering and B.Sc. Nautical Science students on the factors facilitated them to gain their placement was sought, analysed and further recommendation to enhance the soft skills and training and placement classes in under graduation level is suggested through this study.

Index Terms : Soft Skills; Communication Skills; Interpersonal Communication Skills; Personal Skills; Peer Learning; Placement Training; Personality Traits.

1. INTRODUCTION

PLACEMENT is the target behind any professional course at undergraduate level and further very less number of candidates pursues their post graduation, which is also primarily career oriented to procure an immediate placement. Though academic performance in terms of score is focused throughout the under graduation studies, when the candidate aspires for placement, it is not only the score/percentile but also the other factors like soft skills including positive and confident personality, and professional skills play a vital role. How can the candidates master the required soft skills and placement training to build in a confident personality? In order to suffice this requirement, employability skills training through soft skills and placement training are already incorporated in the existing curriculum of professional degree courses like Bachelor of Engineering/ Bachelor of Technology and B. Sc. Nautical Science. In spite of all that, there falls a gap between the existing system and effectiveness in its implementation. Therefore, when the candidates pass out, the immediate challenge is their placement, but when the opportunity is provided through campus interview, those who are good at skills could accomplish placement.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

L M Wahyuni, I K Masih & I N Mei Rejeki state in their Communication Skill Attributes Needed for Vocational Education Enter the Workplace that based on their survey, "the industry demands not only vocational educational skills but also communication" (Wahyuni et al., 2017, p.1). It contributes to the success of the organization so that is very essential that the recruited candidates are good at interpersonal and organizational communication skills. The following are the essentials of interpersonal communication that one should be good at, "(1) speaking skill; (2) questioning skill; (3) opening communication skill; (4) maintaining the courtesy/ manner; (5) the skill to ask for an apology when feeling guilty; (6) responsive and responsible; (7) attentive and care; (8)

empathy; (9) listening skill" (2). In addition to the above stated interpersonal communication skills, the following communication skills are also very crucial for the effective placement and successful functioning:

- 1) Build team work to achieve common objectives; 2) Create a harmonious relationship through mutual communication; 3) Make the team to interact and synergize; 4) Provide the support and improve self-confidence; 5) Build optimism and spirit of the team at work; 6) Utilize the information system to exchange information; 7) Motivate individual or group to achieve the expected objectives; 8) Resolve conflicts through negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy process; 9) Build the trust from others; 10) Build the relationship with people from different backgrounds. (Wahyuni et al., 2017, p.5)

Lin Mei Tan and Laswad Fawzi in their Employability Skills Required of Accountants state that the university programme already provides the learner with "strong technical knowledge and the essential skills to gain employment and make an immediate contribution to a business" (Tan & Fawzi, 2017, p.1). Moreover, they state:

... International education Standard (IES) 3 Initial Professional Development – Professional Skills. This educational standard indicates the level of professional skills needed to perform the role of a professional accountant and classifies the skills under four competency areas: intellectual, interpersonal and communication, personal, and organizational. (Tan & Fawzi, 2017, p.1).

While the technical knowledge and skill is already incorporated in higher education curriculum design and it is the core objective behind college education, the second most important skill is interpersonal and communication skills. Further, they classify the generic skills expected from a competent candidate in to two categories and subcategories as follows:

I. Generic Skills

A. Cognitive Skills

1. Routine/ Technical Skill – use of information technology

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2. Intellectual Skills – solve problems and construct arguments, analyse, reason and conceptualise issue, observant and aware
- B. Behavioural Skills
1. Personal Skills – positive attitude values, act strategically, think and act independently, be flexible
 2. Interpersonal Skills – collaborating with colleagues, the ability to present, discuss and defend views, understand group dynamics
 3. Organisational Skills – apply leadership skills, meet deadlines

In addition to these expected skills, “employers seek to employ people who are forward thinking, lateral thinking, and who can think “outside the box” (6). On the whole “a team player with a positive attitude and good communication skills appeared as most desired by employers”(7) and a “work-ready” candidate. Interpersonal skill is the bridging gap between the academics and the employers’ expectancy from a desirable candidate.

3 METHODOLOGY

Feedback from those who have gained placement through campus interview are collected, based on which an interpretation on factors, which facilitated them to procure placement and the further need, is analysed and consolidated with data presentation and bar chart followed by discussion with recommendations. Hundred students have presented their feedback on the kind of employment training they had and their suggestions for better improvement. The following questions were given to the cadets asking them to provide their answer in detail:

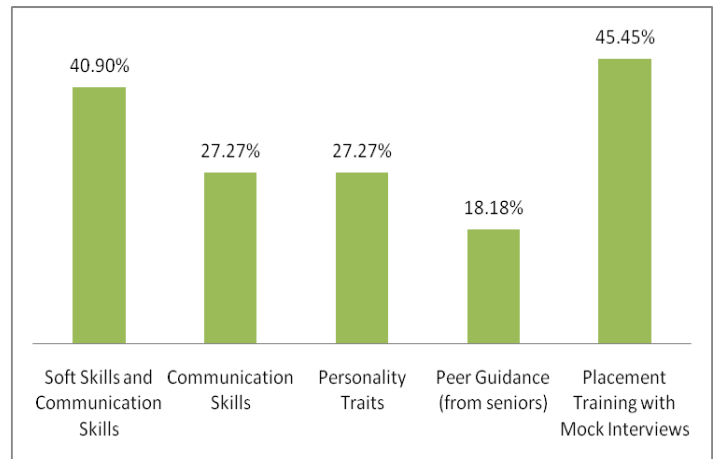
- (1) What do you consider as the reason/s for your placement through campus interview recruitment?
- (2) What are your recommendations to facilitate better placement through campus interview in your institution?

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following tabular column presents the data with percentage as received through feedback from the learners:

Skills Attributed for their Placement	Percentage
Soft Skills and Communication Skills	40.90%
Communication Skills	27.27%
Personality Traits	27.27%
Peer Guidance (from seniors)	18.18%
Placement Training with Mock Interviews	45.45%

According to the feedback received from the learners who have already procured placement, it is inferred that the highest due credit is given to the actual placement training (45.45%) and soft skill training 40.90% provided by the university. Though they have mentioned that the previously accumulated knowledge from schools also helped them to accomplish it during first year of their under graduation, they have added on-campus placement training also. In addition to that exclusive communication skills and personality trait carries equal importance and above all peer learning and guidance play a remarkable role in residential learning programmes like Marine education.



Feedback from Learners who have Gained Placement

The learners state that the major reason is the soft skills training 40.90% and placement training 45.45% offered by the institution through which they have undergone mock interview to overcome the fear and become fluent to communicate their ideas. However, the learners belong to second generation and they have completed their schooling through the second language medium English, but still not fully confident to express their valid ideas spontaneously. They are hesitant, not able to speak in sentences and predominantly using only phrases, not good at stage etiquette, positive gestures, maintaining eye contact and being precise and to the point in providing answers. So all these deficits are rectified through the training at undergraduate level provided by the university/college. Since the main courses are Marine education related, which is a professional course, B.Sc. Nautical Science cadets get an opportunity to procure placement start from their first year itself. Those who have gained placement during first year also give credit to the soft skills and placement training. During the coaching and mock interviews the cadets are trained to speak in front of a group of audience usually peers. They are trained to speak fluently and effectively through a number of speaking skills activities like self introduction, talk about unforgettable incident in your life, give a general presentation on any topic of your choice, give a technical presentation with power point slides, give extempore speech on the topic given etc., in class rooms/ outside classrooms. As Gomathy states, “fluency can be achieved only by speaking” (8). These simulated classroom practice enrich their experience and enable them to outgrow the fear factor of adolescents. While soft skills can be divided as communication skills and personality traits, nearly 27.27% of learners have stated that they gained placement by their effective communication skills whereas the same percentage of due credit is attributed to personality traits like confidence, hard work, perseverance, consistency, positive attitude, boldness and dedication. Developing these personality traits are very essential life skills for any individual to grow successful whether it be career, business or personal life. As Gomathy states that these “people skills are life skills that every student and cadet should have” (98). There is always want of self-imposed discipline and self-motivation also. To inculcate these life skill requirements there is a need of good rapport and communication between the student and the teacher in the classroom and inside the campus. When the teacher-learner interpersonal communication is at healthy level, overall progress in learning and a liking for learning is assured. M.

Subha and D. Nagarani state: The effective classroom management skill requires execution first at the level of learner's behaviour. It is important to take care of the learner's dignity first, as these learners are raw-clay or the reflective-mirrors. When their self-respect gets offended, they either break up or reflect it over the professors. Though the classroom is large with full strength individual attention to an extent that the facilitator is familiar with their name becomes important to make the learner conscious that at any time he/she will be called out.... It is better to state it clearly to the learners the required classroom etiquette and it has to be reiterated now and then, thus behaviour control can take place in due course. Secondly, the discipline implementation is expected to establish an enjoyable learning ambience, which can last for longer duration in learner's mind. (Subha & Nagarani, 2019, p.6103) Peer learning plays a vital role in residential programs like Marine Engineering and Nautical Science, in which candidates are well-trained with parade for physical fitness. Throughout the course duration of four years for Marine and three years for B. Sc. Nautical Science, they are supposed to stay in residence for the entire course duration. Therefore, they have to get along with peers both in classroom and hostel as well. Long stay makes it possible to establish not only hierarchy but also the senior students take over the role of leaders in guiding the junior cadets in all respects including to facilitate better placement. The fresh learners are also willing to learn from their immediate seniors who have recently faced the interview board and procured placement. The immediate seniors' learning is up to the current scenario compared to that of teachers' who served or gained career placement years before. With access to internet and mobile phone the students' (current generation) exposure to current trends is higher than the teacher who belongs to the older generation. The current experiences of the senior cadet can serve better to enlighten the juniors, which is closely similar to the junior learner. In addition to the discussed factors there is always want of technical skill in order to compete with the international standards, which is an ever-going process.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance the learner acquire the desired positive learner attitude and effectiveness in soft skills, soft skills, training and placement and interpersonal communication skills classes need to be enriched with more number of practice sessions through different kinds of activities. The following activities can be incorporated in addition to the already existing classroom activities:

- i. One/ two minute presentation can be a self-introduction, or an instant speech on any topic. When the learners practice this, their mental preparedness to introduce themselves and speak spontaneously on any topic is trained.
- ii. Formal presentation with power point slides display on any given/ opted, technical/ general topic can train the learner in presentation skills including formal body language, eye contact, audibility, good delivery and content.
- iii. Group discussion can enable learners to grow assertive and inculcate leadership ability in handling a group and teamwork skills. The discussion can deliberate on any current existing social issue, which is likely to bring forth different perspectives through which the learners acquire the skill 'agree to disagree'. Learners also sharpen their

problem solving skill by providing viable solution to existing social issues.

Individual presentation for at least five minutes each on any current topic like 'Social Media' can be assigned for which the learners should prepare a proper write up, practice and present it in classroom in front of peers. During their presentation, their speech can be monitored in terms of word stress, sentence stress and intonation. So that not only content and style of speech are modified, but also matter and manner are refined.

6 CONCLUSION

The study explains that training the learners either individually or in group especially in soft skills and mock interviews enables them to develop their employability skills, personality traits and positive learner attitude. The training is possible through the facilitator/ trainer/ teacher/ senior student. When a senior learner trains the junior learner, the former gains leadership ability, which is an essential life skill both in professional and personal domain to lead one's own subordinates and family respectively. "World Health Organization" states that interpersonal and communication skill is very essential for mental health. It has become essential and need of the hour to incorporate and refine the life skill called interpersonal communication skill to facilitate a learner to be successful and procure better career placement and to move upward.

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