

ENHANCING GRADUATE STUDENTS' EMPLOYABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY SKILLS THROUGH VALUE EDUCATION COURSES

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication has become a primary need while hiring graduates to the corporate sectors. Apart from the language skills, employability skills also play a major role in performance indicators. As a result, it has become mandatory for higher education institutions to introduce value added education courses to students on employability and sustainability skills such as leadership, group discussion and public speaking. Teaching these skills empower the students to imbibe the essential skills needed to be successful in the workforce. This research paper aims to highlight the importance of value-added education courses in higher education for the Employability and Sustainability of graduates.

Keywords: employability; sustainability; group discussion; leadership; public speaking

Introduction

Communication in its numerous modes permeates today's professional milieu. The corporate world is souring high with the demand for new hires with exceptional skills. The present business organizations expect graduates to be a valuable knowledge resource and the new hires are expected to be today's knowledge economy, wherein businesses can thrive and grow. Not only language skills, but also the employability skills play a key role as performance indicators in workplaces. Graduates' technical skills, coupled with employability skills are used to indicate their cognitive strength. It is of course a challenging scenario for both the employers and the employees in the corporate sectors, to run businesses where technical knowledge, cognitive skills and language skills have to be networked in collaboration. Thereby, competency in these skills has become a question for both employers and the new hires.

Though the corporates expect high-caliber skills performance from the graduates, there still exists a mismatch between the skill set of the graduates and the expectation of the corporates. The 2018 Applicant Survey QS report suggests "that prospective students do not fully understand how employers value skills. Students tend to over-value the importance of creativity and leadership skills and under-value the importance of flexibility/adaptability and teamwork, which employers regard with high importance", Josephine West (2018). Graduates are expected to be well equipped not only in their technical knowledge but also in their employability skills. "To get hired, the bare minimum requirement could be knowledge expertise, but for advancement in career and to climb up the corporate ladder, employability skills are a necessity. Today, graduate employability has moved a notch higher on the agenda

of industry and business schools” says Avramenko, Alex (2012). Effective speaking, leadership skills, negotiation, team-playing, problem solving etc., are some of the skills that enable graduates to become employable and then sustain the employment. According to Bhagra, Ashita; Sharma, Dinesh Kumar (2018), “Changes in career requirements and job market, including the death of 'a job for life', have turned into an unwillingness of industry to invest much in the workforce. Most companies are afraid that a trained employee may join a competitor without accruing benefits of training to the company”.

It has become mandatory to inculcate traits like employability and sustainability in workforce in students. In order to inculcate these traits, Value Added Education goes resourceful. Fugate et al. (2004) refer to employability as “a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize job opportunities”. Employability involves the ability to provide intellectual and knowledgeable resource to the need of the workforce, while sustainability is the ability to uphold the employment effectively. So, Value Added Education helps in nurturing the employability and sustainability skills in an effective manner.

Undoubtedly, the onus has fallen on educational institutions to educate their learners on the importance of possessing the employability skills. Many universities and colleges have also understood the need to develop their learners with skills that would make them successful in the workplace. Nowadays, universities and colleges have begun to focus on value education elective courses such as leadership, group discussion and public speaking, to empower the students to become employable. These courses enhance the students’ employability skills and make them to succeed in the workforce.

LEADERSHIP

Successful leadership is one of the top indispensable quality needed for an organization to withstand its business in the midst of challenges which are produced by rapid economic growth. The Leadership skill course serves as an important tool to place the employee on the ladder of position and power. Therefore, it is important for higher educational setups to introduce leadership course, to enable the graduates to sustain in the corporate arena. The essential traits taught in the course could be goal setting, team motivation, conflict management, development of positive attitude and collaborative skills. Graduates of various streams of study such as engineering, arts, management etc. need to possess these traits in order to be successful leaders. Indeed, it has become mandatory for education sectors to run such value-added education courses that caters to the employability of their students. While teaching leadership skills in the higher education platform, educational institutions could also focus on the certain valuable attributes which are essential to develop the students’ leadership skills. They are given in the following table:

Table 1. Leadership Skills to Develop

Critical thinking	Networking	Problem solving	Coaching/mentoring	Coaching/mentoring
Communication	Collaboration	Time management	Change management	Crisis management

Motivation	Negotiation	Technical competency	Facilitation techniques	Recruiting skills
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Anthony Kurec (2016)

According to Anthony Kurec (2016) “Becoming a great leader is an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary one. It is a lifetime process of learning certain skills and enhancing innate characteristics that define a great leader”.

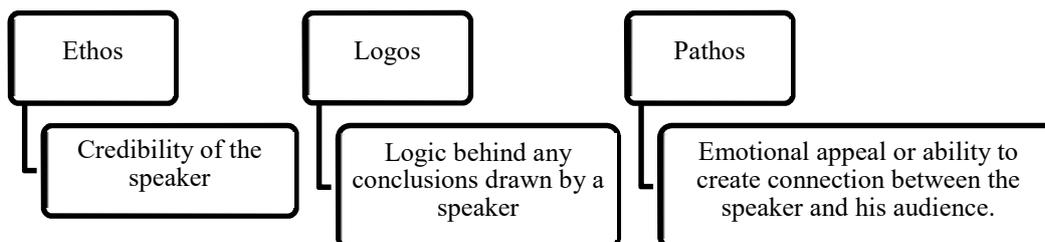
GROUP DISCUSSION

Group discussion is an essential process involved during interviews. In fact, it is an acid test for students that show their team-working skills to the employer. Interviewers use group discussions as a means to remove large number of candidates from the interview list. Group discussion courses can include traits such as communication, problem solving, decision making, initiation and team management. Consequently, group discussion courses enable the students to exhibit the above mentioned skills in interviews. Group discussion activities in the classroom setup helps the students to simulate the real life scenario exhibited during interviews. Linneman A. Judith (2019) adds, “Discussion-based courses stimulate learning by exposing students to the perspectives of classmates and require them to develop higher level cognitive skills as they use evidence to articulate their views, frame arguments, summarize and/or defend their positions, and perhaps compromise”.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Oral communication has infiltrated the business environment in the form of interviews, meetings, presentations, telephone communication etc. Yet, most of the corporate houses have neglected the importance of public speaking and have less prioritized the speaking skill. Nevertheless, effective speaking skills have become mandatory for securing employment. Furthermore, companies expect candidates to be fluent in speaking skills since the profession requires communicating with Indian and overseas clients in English. “Whether your goal is to enhance your professional growth, take your business to next level, or inspire, persuade and motivate other people to follow your lead, you will have to learn how to convey your ideas in front of a group of people in a clear, structured and captivating manner” says Nikitina, Arina (2011). Greek philosopher and teacher of Alexander the Great, Aristotle has offered three basic elements of persuasion, which can be applicable for public speaking. The elements are:

Figure 1. Elements of Persuasion



Adopted from

Nikitina, Arina (2011, p.10)

Effective public speaking elevates a person to great position and office. Therefore, mastering the art of public speaking has become essential for professional growth and promotion. So, offering value education courses in ‘speaking’ have become important. A course in public speaking involves stage etiquettes, voice modulation, body language, content delivery and audience relation. Importantly, the course prepares the students to speak confidently and effectually.

CONCLUSION

The rapid growth of science and technology has brought the need to inculcate graduates with the skills that are essential for employability and sustainability. It has become important for graduates to sharpen their leadership, group discussion and public speaking skills in order to be employable and sustainable in the workforce. The view echoed by Nunzio Quacquarelli, CEO of QS, in his comments about the function universities play in preparing graduates for employment says, “It is becoming more and more vital that universities also prepare graduates for the world of work. This means that the development of soft skills, like team-playing and resilience, often becomes as important as the technical skills and knowledge acquired during a degree...”, Josephine West (2018).

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