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SOFT SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ENRICHING EMPLOYABILITY OF TECHNICAL STUDENTS

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***Abstract*— The present paper attempts to intensify capacity and inculcate employability among Technical Students of Jharkhand in respect of globalization. Demands of present business world or work place are higher, and learning attitude, critical thinking, decision making skills along with other employable skills seems crucial in its employees. The technical students must be trained during their technical course in accordance to the industry-demands; and this is a real challenge of the technical institutions in Jharkhand, especially for the private one. Triangular role of the 'Institution-Faculty-Students' needs proper execution to fulfill the dynamic objective of higher education that is 'reaching of the un-reached' in knowledge, skills and values. Learning is a life-long process and students need to learn from their day to day activities. This paper deals with the process which enables the technical students to develop a thought process. Students need to learn appropriate reasons and logics behind their every acceptance or rejections. In this respect, a constructive environment is required to facilitate students where they don't hesitate to do mistakes and solely focus on 'Learning'.**

Keywords— Technical students, Facilitators, Learning, Critical thinking, Employability, Work place demand, Professionalism

I. INTRODUCTION

Primary aim of Higher Education is to provide ample opportunity for employment, either in public sector, private sector or promotes entrepreneurship. Also, employment motivates and encourages students for higher education. It also aims to equip students with skills like communication skills, critical thinking, leadership, team work, time management, and much more in the list. These skills are actually a sure ticket to success, and therefore, institutions and organizations all must concentrate on building these skills.

The present scenario of the work place is that the employees, specially the newly admitted, are really lacking the basics of '–ism'- Mannerism and Behaviorism, Professionalism. Here we can easily find a gap between what the technical students are taught and what the business culture requires. Business culture wants the passion of learning in their employees; and rests they can make the employees learn through varieties of trainings and workshops. Most of the CEOs and Directors of the national and multinational companies have repeatedly said that most of the technical freshers are lacking soft skills and hence not fit for the job. Even the HR Recruiters of the IT Companies have to achieve the targets of recruiting hundreds of fresh or experienced candidates approximately in every fortnight, but they face multiple challenges due to lack of communication skills and other important soft skills in candidates.

II. SOFT SKILLS AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Soft skills are also known as People skills or Social skills. These are the personality traits and behaviors. It supports situational awareness and enhances individual's ability to get a job done in a desired way. It has been expected from technical students that they must be sound not only in their respective technical fields but also in handling of their work, colleagues, sub-ordinates, customers, and any other person related to them directly or indirectly. These expectations are normally not meant for a person pursuing non-technical studies; but become mandatory and a must for promotion and professional growth for Engineering and other technical students. Unfortunately, the Employers find a 'disconnect' regarding values and ethics, and work place behavior in their employees.

Discussing about the *importance* of soft skills for technical students, first, in getting employment and second, making professional growth are very crucial, and some of the Academicians say that it is the single way to get desired outcomes in professional life. Although, soft skills has a direct link with personal life and upliftment too, but for professional and work place it is mandatory and unavoidable. Shikha Setha says, "Communication skill is essential for an Engineer who aspires to carry out his professional practice in the global arena."[1] Technical students at the edge of completing their studies and preparing for interviews and making themselves

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ready for the new life of earning or getting employed must know that *Soft Skills* are the basic demand at work place. An article published on May 2017 in *Deloitte Access Economics*, DeakinCo. with the title '*Soft skills for business success*' reports: "Deloitte Access Economics forecasts that soft skill intensive occupations will account for two-thirds of all jobs by 2030, compared to half of all jobs in 2000."[2] Kate Davidson report published on Aug. 30, 2016 in The *Wall Street Journal* which says: "In a Wall Street Journal survey of nearly 900 executives last year, 92% of executives say that soft skills are equally important or more important than technical skills. But 89% said they have a very or somewhat difficult time finding people with the requisite attributes."[3]



Fig.1.1

An article published by National Soft Skills Association on February 13, 2015, under the title 'The Soft Skills Disconnect' says:
"Research conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Centre has all concluded that 85% of job success comes from having well-developed soft and people skills, and only 15% of job success comes from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills)."[4]



Fig. 1.2
Image by National Soft Skills Association

III. ROLE OF TEACHERS IN INCULCATING SOFT SKILLS

Teachers in higher education are the facilitators who facilitate all possible environments to the students to learn and grasp new learning. The role of the facilitator is crucial as they have to make their students believe on the importance of soft skills, and then induce soft skills in students using familiar examples and appropriate activities. Peggy Klaus in his book *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills* rightly says "Soft skills get little respect but will make or break your career."[5]. This is a challenge before the soft skill trainer or the facilitator to motivate students and keep their interest in learning soft skills. Today students are not interested to invest their time in learning any subject other than their course work. They prepare only for those papers for which they have to appear in the exam. Here real challenge for the facilitator arises; and the challenge is to bridge between institution and industry. Before the day one in the work place, students need to face several interviews and group discussions; and to succeed in these parameters students need to have ample knowledge in communication skills and soft skills. Also, students in technical institutions have lots of everyday activities where their performance needs to be at least considerable, if not excellent. Students have to participate in every day class activities, institutional extracurricular activities, national or international level of inter-college activities, regular exams or completive exams, viva-voce, project presentation, etc. Students having soft skills can perform better than those who are not. Soft skills provide confidence and bring desired outcomes in preparing a firm base to achieve professionalism. Communication skills are the major soft skills, and mostly students hesitate and fail in making an effective communication. Dr. Madhumati R. Patil says: "English is a confidence builder language. It will get you anywhere. If you are good speaker in English means good in all. Therefore, engineers have to communicate in English."[6] Facilitators or trainers need to be very patient, and calmly and slowly they have to build interest of students in learning soft skills. Students need regular counseling and motivation. Also, the facilitators need to update themselves regularly, using latest journals and articles and by attending seminars, conferences etc., and highlight before the learners the importance and need of soft skills in getting employment and success. Facilitators can utilize 'punishment and reward' methodology. Along with, they must execute a dynamic personality, so that the students can easily imitate and learn from them. Yaowaluck Ruampol and Suthakorn Wasupokin rightly say: "Teachers with effective teaching quality seem to be the most important factors in raising both student achievement and educational quality."[7] Use of varieties of teaching methodology and teaching aids, depending on students' level of understanding, can motivate students and help them in acquiring expertise.



IV. ROLE OF STUDENTS IN ACQUIRING SOFT SKILLS

Students studying in technical campuses are generally from variety of background- family, social and economic. Many of them have completed their primary, secondary and higher secondary education from the schools or institutions where the medium of instruction is not English. Out of sudden these students face problem in learning new things in new environment. Thus, they concentrate mainly on learning technical paper and pay less attention in acquiring soft skills. One reason for their less attention can be students' hesitation to face audience due to lack of communicative skills, and hence, starts skipping the classes on building soft skills. Another reason is that they don't have to pass or qualify examination on soft skills and behaviors. Thus, generally students give no response and importance to soft skills at the time of institutional education. In the present era, students are exam-minded; mostly, students study only to get marks and high scores. They pay less attention on understanding the matter as a whole. On the other hand, acquiring soft skills require continuous efforts and regular practice.

Seeing the demands of soft skills as a basic and imperative employability skill students need to show commitment towards learning and acquiring it. They must take the responsibility of their own personality development and enriching employability skills. No doubt that in higher education role of teacher is imperative and crucial in imparting education, but at the same time it constitutes only 25% of students' success. Teachers teach same content to the whole class and to all students, but it is the individual's effort that makes the difference. Going through the same content provided by the teacher, few students get high score and rest of them perform average and above average. Thus, students need to be attentive and active because it is their career and they have to take full charge and responsibility of making it a successful and outstanding career.

V. CONCLUSION

Soft skills have been the base of employability. To get success and sustain in the present competitive world soft skills like communication skills, critical thinking, leadership quality, public speaking etc help to enrich personal performance whereas soft skills like conflict management, problem solving, interpersonal skills, adaptability, etc. help in building appreciable relation with colleagues, supervisor, and clients. Equipping students with soft skills require efforts from each sides- facilitator and students. Both have to crucially take their responsibility. Finally, as preparing themselves for industry, students need to have regular assessment, for this they should participate in institutional and inter-college activities, tech-fest, public speaking, etc, and based on their level of performance they need to enhance their capabilities.

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