Chapter-1
Introduction

The rise of English in India has been phenomenal in the last couple of years. This growth can be attributed to a number of factors like globalization, liberalization and privatization. English has strengthened its position in various sectors, given its significance as almost a lingua franca of the world of business, international trade etc and assumed importance even countries that were formerly British colonies before they attained independence, like India, for example. It is an accepted fact that English has given hope to millions of youth across the nation in terms of adding to their employability and has been instrumental in uplifting the financial conditions by giving them access to the job market in numerous important sectors.

Despite the fact that English has opened up for us immense opportunities, there is yet a major segment of student population found lacking in skills and thus unable to allow their latent potential manifest in performance. This is due to lack of communication and work-related skills which prevents them from developing self-confidence. It is difficult to say whether or not the academic inputs provided and teaching strategies used by the teachers allow the learners to have sufficient exposure to all the four language skills. There is a definite need for what we call ‘liberalization of language’ to help our students achieve adequate levels of proficiency in English. We believe that we often indulge in what we choose to call ‘language escapism’ for want of a better phrase, under the garb of patriotism. This
seems to have hampered the pace of progress due to low levels of proficiency in English. We seem to have overlooked the fact that English allows us access to valuable frontiers of ever-growing knowledge and employment. English is not only a means to achieve employment but it also plays a role in social upliftment and financial independence. Many youngsters who have become beneficiaries due to language proficiency can vouch for the same. Nandan Nilekani (2008: 95) explains this phenomenon in these words, “English is emerging as the language of aspiration for the Indian population – as a passport to a lucrative job and entry into the country’s growing middle class.”

Language proficiency needs to be understood in the context of employment, which has so far either been missing or not given any due consideration. Language skills and a student’s employability are deeply interrelated, which can no more be sidelined. This interrelationship can flourish only if the gap between language skills and employability is bridged with a course that caters to students’ language and work-place skills, which are what we precisely, intend to do. The potential of language proficiency to attract jobs and to get self-employed must be utilized to the maximum.

Globalization and industrialization are two strong forces, which has necessitated a professional skill-set that prospective employees need to develop. These skills ensure job security and to a large extent new growth avenues; locally and globally. Given the hectic schedule that company managers have, they consider it almost
unnecessary to train freshly recruited employees, rather they believe to hire job-ready people, who would readily adapt and adjust to new challenges, colleagues and perform efficiently at the same time.

Let us shift our focus to National aims. The vision of transforming India into a superpower can be achieved through English language which can help us though incrementally, to materialize our precious vision. Today the world is considered as a Global village where activities of people are interrelated and they themselves are interdependent. It would not be inappropriate to say that English catapults its proficient users to global outlook through exposure eat local level.

We Indians are uniquely positioned to tap into English language advantage given the eagerness of a strong segment of our youth to demonstrate their skills for maximum career gain. We believe English is no more a language of a privileged few but has achieved the status of an ‘inevitable language’ for increasing the employability of our student population. English can open many avenues for us at the national and global levels but our students remain deprived of making the most of all the opportunities available to them due to insufficient language proficiency. It appears that students may be efficient on various fronts, but lose out when opportunities come knocking and have to highlight their skills through the medium of English.

The point we are trying to drive home is that there should be an intensive English language short-term courses at postgraduate level to prepare students for the
enhancing their potential on the professional front, for it is only this that will ensure their smooth transition from learners to professionals. Although such courses seem viable, we need to diagnose with precision the loopholes in their communicative language ability and work out strategies to make these courses target-oriented.

We can no longer subscribe to the idea of the ‘one-syllabus-suits-all’ approach in designing training programmes for our students. Approaches and learner needs must be accounted for to avoid any polarity. Not only is the selection and blend of approaches a matter of concern but its assimilation is equally a cause for concern and a certain meticulous handling is required to avoid possible friction with the already existing core courses.

The course which we are planning to structure addresses the expectations of employers as well as students. The former would prefer linguistically skilled employees (given the widespread use of English in various sectors) and the latter needs to get equipped with all four language skills enhancing their chances of getting employed in the sector of their choice.

The undertaken research focuses on developing, structuring and programming short-term courses for English language competence. It is an undeniable truth that students do not develop any satisfactory level of language proficiency, even after the completion of their post-graduate studies. We believe that there is a need to develop
a course which can enable post-graduate students to exploit the opportunities available locally, nationally and internationally through the medium of English.

The current core courses studied by students at PG level do not have any provision or scope for English language enrichment. This lack deprives them of premier professional opportunities forcing them to settle for a semi-standard designation. Due to this gross mismatch or gap between the skills they need to know and industry requirements, many recruiters are disappointed during campus recruitment or interviews as they do not find any relevant and necessary skills in prospective employees. This happens as there is no student-centric course to bridge what they do not know and what they are supposed to know. It is an injustice to neglect the needs of students who are the major stakeholders in learning and so due attention to their requirements is preferable. It is high time that course designers and implementers made ample provisions to include the students’ needs. As we are aware of the investment done by the respective government in the education of students, we believe that course designers and implementers are accountable to them for the kind of outcome that is reflected through student performance and future employment.

The subject of the research deals with the preparation and trialling out short-term courses for post graduate students. The chosen subject aims at developing comprehensive and career-oriented courses which are interactive in nature and keeps the current language learning requirements of students as its priority. Not only this but these courses are to be prepared only after careful consideration to employer expectation and teachers’ feedback.
The syllabi have no provision for the development of listening skills in general and active listening and presentation skills in particular. Since English is a foreign or second language for us, depending on the programmes concerned, we have very little option but to master all of the skills in English language.

 Usually, the syllabi emphasize reading and writing over listening and speaking. The shift in overall focus towards English language has made it inevitable for the students to learn four language skills, i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing and this is accounted for in internationally valid tests of English such as TOEFL and IELTS. The learning of all these skills is believed to be necessary for the students to get an edge competitive at the global level through proficiency in English.

Eventually we came to a consensus on preparing short-term courses which would be integrated into formal framework of post-graduate studies making students English-enabled and fit for professional rigour. There is no doubt about the fact that my own observation of my peers in M.A. shaped the researcher’s understanding about the language needs and weaknesses of theirs which motivated me to do research in designing short-term courses under the mentorship of my guide to empower students language-wise.

The other reason which prompted me for thorough research was the incapacity of post-graduate students to impress employers about their skills through the medium
of English. Though students were well-informed in their domain knowledge, they were not able to articulate the same and convince them in English. In such circumstances we can mention with confidence that communication skills in English becomes an entry-point for any well-paid, professional and responsible jobs. The researcher’s exposure to the teaching field has had a significant impact on deciding about the undertaken research. As an IELTS trainer and communicative English trainer the researcher observed adult students from close quarters and felt that the limited number of students at my workplace represents in microcosm the real magnitude of language problems adult students face during or post their post-graduate studies.

The currently prescribed syllabi taught at University level obviously aims at giving learners training and practice in ‘English for the exam’ which is why they find themselves in no man’s land when they face job interviews. The business world expects and demands that a post-graduate job-aspirant not only speaks English accurately and communicatively, but also be conversant in job related skills.

Globalization has thrown new job opportunities with multinational companies setting up ventures in countries other than the native ones where they are located. The possibilities of work in multinational and multicultural environments require a specific set of skills including intercultural skills, internationally accepted etiquettes and job-related registers and all of these demonstrated in their use of English.
English and professional skills (a preferable combination that ensures a well-paid job) have always attracted various foreign companies, apart from the national ones, to invest in India and have created many direct and indirect jobs, which can impact the entire economy as well. This sentiment is corroborated by Nandan Nilekani (2008, 324) in his book *Imagining India* in the following words,

The tide of new private sector jobs took off with the IT sector, which together with the BPO industry has created 1.6 million new jobs over the last two decades. The IT and BPO jobs have helped trigger a vibrant domestic economy and, particularly since 2003, a growing tide of jobs across industries.

The undertaken research aims in preparation and trialling out short-term courses for post-graduate students. Here the term short-term needs to be elaborated to gain a considerable insight into its feasibility, market requirements and flexibility. We can witness a surge in the demand for English-speaking professionals across all sectors. In such a scenario Post-graduate departments hold the key to supply potential professionals by grooming them in English language proficiency and train them in work-place skills. The lack of language skills should not become a stumbling block in their progress. In this era of knowledge, English has become a potent tool for the youth to communicate with the rest of the world. English should no more be considered as the language of the classes but of the masses and so language training should form an inextricable part of the core course.
This research aims to design short-term courses by keeping in its focus six objectives, each one of which has its own significance and a role to play. Initially, let us understand the term ‘short-term courses’. These courses are intensive and holistic as it takes into consideration the current situation, which demands language-wise adept candidates to be inducted into various jobs. Such courses are meant to give a satisfactory ‘language alignment’ before students get into their professional framework. Such courses act as a morale booster for students in the final stage of their Post-graduation.


To enable institutions to cater effectively to changing economy and industry needs, our educational policy should encourage greater collaboration between industry and universities in curricula and course design, as well as industry research.

This research is firmly anchored in the belief that students need to have English language competency for a better career growth. Annually hundreds of post-graduates churn out of various departments with minimal or nearly no English language usage skills which makes them a minority in the Global language. By
being proficient in their domain knowledge and supplemented by English language skills can help them to secure a professional safe mode position.

In a CII Gen Next Workforce Summit 2013 held in New Delhi, the former minister of state for human resource development, Dr. Shashi Tharoor said that,

By 2020, 64% of our population will be of a working age (between 15 and 59 years). We can only leverage this talent pool if we educate and train this pool to take advantage of the opportunities the 21st century has to offer.

This century belongs to the developing countries like India, as developed nations prefer to invest in a low-cost and highly professional labour market. Multi-national companies can get the necessary talent pool only if we train our students in language proficiency and job-related skills. In today’s borderless world English language has become a prerequisite for jobs and professional ascent. A person with excellent language skills is considered to be intellectually superior, professionally polished, and reliable. This person commands more respect than his or her language-wise unskilled counterparts. This truth is palpable and so it cannot and should not be on the backburner.

English has come a long way from the language of the colonizers to the language of opportunities. The success story of the Indian IT sector is a true reflection and blend of technological skill and English language proficiency. The developed nations
outsource their work to India due to a host of reasons ranging from cost-effectiveness to the availability of a rich pool of talented youth. The latter reason has a strong resonance as ‘a rich pool of talented youth’ not only means domain specific skills but also language finesse. A large share of international work is outsourced to India chiefly due to ‘similar language links’. Most of the developed nations are English speaking and so a common language gives a feeling of oneness and lends credibility. These are some of the instances which highlight the significance and inevitability of English language. In other sectors too, English is imperative and has a considerable usage.

One recent estimate by Graddol, (2006, 35) suggests that over 20,000 American schoolchildren now receive e-tutoring support from India. India has also graduated from BPO services to KPO services which involve specialized knowledge which require research skills and the exercise of professional judgment. KPO focuses on areas like medicine, legal research, space research, nanotechnology, financial and market analysis etc. (Graddol, D, 2006, 37)

The BPO scenario in India is also corroborated by Thomas Friedman (2005, 24) in his well-known book, The World is Flat on globalization,

There are currently about 245,000 Indians answering phones from all over the world or dialling out to solicit people for credit cards or cell phone bargains or overdue bills. These call centre jobs are low-wage, low-prestige
jobs in America, but when shifted to India they become high-wage, high-prestige jobs.

Our research, therefore, has objectives meant to train Post-Graduate students comprehensively, making them competition-enabled and in turn empowered. Let us discuss the objectives which are firmly anchored in their rationales.

The first objective states, ‘To make needs analyses of those enrolled on Post-Graduate studies in English’. Needs analyses have become an integral part of many sectors and so education sector too should consider it to be the medium to know what students aspire for, their inclination and expectations.

Needs analyses give us a fair insight into the students’ current expectations from English language courses. It helps us to check the pulse of the current scenario, which can guide us as a compass or a GPS (its modern counterpart) in locating the accurate destination. Here by destination we mean the actual learner needs. We cannot afford to and should no more neglect or ignore this dimension of needs analyses while designing a course for students. A course can never be consummate if it is designed in isolation of learner needs. It only defeats the very purpose of the course. To support the point we would like to cite an example from the book, *Marketing Management*, ICMR (May 2004)
Marketing starts with identifying customer needs and wants and ends with satisfying them through a coordinated set of activities that also allows a firm to achieve its own goals.

In marketing parlance needs analyses means customer oriented planning and operations. As marketing places customers as the focal point of any business endeavour for maximum profit and expansion in the same way we should also give precedence to needs analyses over tailor-made courses to gauge learner requirements and satisfaction. This would make students feel that they too have a stake in the curriculum designing process.

Courses not based on needs analyses may fall short of achieving their desired outcomes. Courses which are not designed in tune with the learner needs may straight jacket their potentialities and skills making them vulnerable to unemployment and disillusionment from the secured degree. To avoid any such dismal scenario, the very foundation of any course should be laid on needs analyses to make it a success. It also ensures interest, participation and ultimately learning.

The second objective focuses on the changing expectations of the recruiters and employers and to get their feedback on the candidates at regular intervals once they are employed. Our short-term courses would give considerable significance to employer needs as they have a pivotal role to play in the selection of candidates. Due to Globalization, the very nature of selection process has undergone a drastic
change. There are several layers or phases of interview to decide about a candidate’s calibre and to select him or her. Employers are setting new standards, parameters and benchmarks to filter the appropriate candidate.

As the selection process becomes stringent day-by-day, candidates need to have excellent English language skills to get through the rigor and so we wish to design language courses which fulfil the expectations of potential employers. Today many candidates are not able to reach the bar set by employers due to lack of proficiency. Degree-wise they fulfil the criterion but language-wise they are incompetent. The latter instead of their strength becomes a stumbling block in their progress. The regular feedback from the employers on the employed candidates, would also give us valuable insights into the inclusion of necessary modules in the short-term courses.

To cut the long story short, employers now give secondary significance to degrees and certificates because their primary demand is communication skills or language prowess. It is high time that we included the expectations of employers for designing any course.

The third objective states ‘to assimilate the four language skills at Post-graduate level emulating the IELTS model with the required modifications depending on the students’ likely future needs’. This objective is a well thought one, as it emphasis the assimilation of four language skills with the required changes for comprehensive
training in English. No single skill would make students competent in English as every language skill has a role to play and are interwoven. This focus on the four language pillars can give the necessary momentum in their career. Due to various technological advancements, interaction with people in the other cities, states and countries has multiplied which is not only communicative but also written interaction.

To substantiate the point we would like to cite an example from the following web link: (http:www.ict4lt.org/en/warschauer.htm)

Language learners can communicate directly, inexpensively and conveniently with other learners or speakers of the target language 24 hours a day from work or home. This communication can be asynchronous (not simultaneous) through tools such as e-mail which allows each participant to compose messages at their time or pace or it can be synchronous ‘real time’ like voice chat or text chat.

We have mentioned words like ‘required modifications’, ‘likely future needs’ with careful forethought. The framework of IELTS may need some changes to make it compatible with learner needs and learning styles. These changes would be subtle so as to retain the essence of IELTS model. This will help plug any loopholes in the effectiveness of the Short-term courses. The IELTS model will provide a necessary
fillip for the students’ learning graph and motivation. Our usual education framework does not have any such model which can be emulated for students’ academic progress. The required changes would be made keeping in mind the rest of the objectives. We cannot implement the IELTS model ‘as it is’ as it would disturb the regular framework or pattern of teaching and learning and so making some changes would be the most desired step so as to interwove this model seamlessly.

If theory is the platform, experience is the launch pad. Our fourth objective lays importance on experience through field-work. The implementation of this objective would prove to be an eye-opener for the involved students as they would have firsthand experience and exposure to various government and private academic institutes, making them realize the reach and importance of English language along with ground realities. They would get the preview of the professional challenges to be faced by them once they are employed. As they are supposed to prepare a report on English language’s widespread use and acceptance, in these institutions, they would gain some insight into its present and future usefulness and its strong command in securing them a job.

Field-work would expose them to extensive interaction with scores of people, which would help them to realize their own shortcomings in English. This realization can possibly motivate them to put in more efforts in polishing their language skills before they apply for a job or get into the professional world. Through field-work they would become aware about the presence and significance of English language.
Field-work catapults them from merely learners to active users of English in real life context. If they are somehow reluctant to communicate or interact in English, field-work would definitely change their attitude and outlook towards it.

The fifth objective is ‘To interview teachers as well and get their feedback on reports from their students’. Short-Term courses can be designed in a failure-proof fashion with the assistance, coordination and valuable insights from the teaching fraternity. Teachers observe students from close quarters as a result of which they gain substantial depth of understanding of their tendencies, aspirations, outlook and motivating factors. Teachers’ feedback can have a far-reaching impact on our courses as it would give us the true reflection of students’ opinion and expectations from English language courses. Teachers cannot be dissociated from course designing, as it may prove academically retrogressive decision. Teachers have a pivotal role to play in designing such courses through their precious and genuine contribution.

As they interact with students on daily basis, they are better positioned to suggest the required changes and inclusions in the short-term courses. Their inputs can contribute immensely for the creation of balanced short-term courses instead of a lop-sided one. Here the word balanced means the courses encompassing the necessary aspects of language skills for their overall growth.
This objective along with the first one can help us sculpt short-term courses in an exemplary and precise fashion. There is no doubt about the fact that the first and the fifth objective can give a unique and precise shape to our courses. These two objectives though different are complementary to each other as their target is to structure suitable, compatible and intensive courses.

The sixth and final objective focuses on the annual upgrading of syllabi and its significance. In the current scenario where everything is transitory, we should upgrade our syllabi annually to keep pace with the ever changing world. We should assimilate what is necessary and new and we should exclude the contents that are not essential. An upgraded syllabus holds the key to the training of a responsible and competition-spirited generation. The essence of this objective can be understood by the following lines by Diana Cheng-Man Lau (2010) (Analyzing the curriculum Development process: three models, University of Macau, Macau):

In this new era of flexibility and change, the institution of education seems to be the most out-dated sector. What is advocated in the modernist curriculum cannot prepare students to survive and further develop in the postmodernist era.

The world is no more the same what it was couple of decades back. IT revolution and MNCs in India have changed the very definition and framework of expectations from higher education. The prescribed syllabi cannot be adhered to for more than
couple of months as new ideas, developments and research prompts it to change. Upgradation is in the interest of students as it bestows them with the recent knowledge helping them to compete with their counterparts globally.
References


3. Ibid, p.37


7. “The Times of India”; *Ascent*: Event Report, CII Gen Next Workforce Summit 2013, 4 September 2013 (Print)

