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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH

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Abstract:-The concept of Vocational Education, which has become highly relevant today, was introduced in India just after independence. It offers specialized and practical knowledge through which an individual gains skills and experiences directly linked to a career and thereby gives way to better employment opportunities. A proper implementation of vocational education will help in patching the gap between the skilled workers required and the skilled workers available in the job-market which in turn will solve the problem of unemployment.

Increasing 'internationalization' has made English a 'global resource'. It has become the common means of communication. It has become prime consideration in almost every job and essential for social and career advancement. With this growing demand of English, 'Communicative English' or 'Communication Skills' becomes very relevant and important as a course of vocational education. The need of time is a careful planning, successful implementation and social awareness.

Keywords: Vocational education, communication, English, planning, implementation, awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and skills are the two specific forms of human capital framework. While general education is knowledge-centered, vocational education and technical education are skill-centered. General education is convenient across one's life and from job to job, whereas, vocational education and technical education have an advantage of assimilating specific job relevant skills which make the learner more productive and suitable for a given job.

Vocational education, also known as Vocational Education and Training (VET), is an important element of the nation's education system. The aim of this education is to educate learners for better performance and to earn profitable outcomes by proper training and equipping them with all the practical knowledge and social skills necessary to play a productive role in the country's economy. Thus the learner or person gets a job faster and becomes an able and accountable citizen of society instead of becoming an unproductive burden. Thomas Balogh, a leading social scientist, has emphatically said: "As a purposive factor for rural-socio-economic prosperity and progress, education must be technical, vocational and democratic." (Balogh, 262)

Need for Vocational Education: Education becomes useless if it fails to make people fit for a livelihood. After independence, a large number of educational institutes have been established. But, unfortunately, most of these institutes have failed to lay importance on the quality of education they impart. The products of these institutes find themselves incapable of earning a livelihood for themselves. Hence, instead of increasing the quantity of institutes for general studies, it would be much better to introduce more vocational courses or subjects in different institutes and vocational centers so as to make education meaningful and fruitful.

World economy today is changing towards knowledge and skill based economy. Only the person who is expert in a particular field is able to get a decent job or livelihood. Gandhiji, too, advocated a Craft Centered System of Education to equip the learners with certain vocational skills to enable them to earn a living in the future. As such, to make pace with the changing economy, an individual needs to be skilled or specialized in a particular field.

Government's Initiative: The concept of vocational education was introduced in India just after independence and, since then, several educational commissions constituted have reflected the need for Vocational Education. A number of reforms have been implemented to improve the production of required skilled persons in various fields. Vocational education programme in India is being monitored by The Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD). All India Council for Vocational Education (AICVE), which works under MHRD, manifests the planning and prepares guideline for coordinating

the programme at national level and State Councils for Vocational Education (SCVE) perform analogous function at the state level.

National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 (revised on 1992), emphasized on the necessity of application-oriented courses for college and university students. A core committee under the chairmanship of Dr T N Dhar was formed to review the implementation of vocational courses at degree level. The committee proposed that there is no necessity of changing the existing three year degree course and a student should take at least one vocational subject during their undergraduate study.

On the basis of the recommendations of the Dhar Committee, University Grants Commission (UGC) adopted the scheme of vocational education in 1994-1995 to ensure the production of sufficient skilled persons to meet the demands in various fields. UGC has taken initiatives to vocationalise undergraduate courses in Arts, Science and Commerce faculties. It has also given liberty to the respective college or university to identify their own 'need based' career oriented courses so that the student after completing his education is able to obtain a gainful employment in general and self-employment in particular.

Steps to be Taken: Success or failure of a programme depends on perfect vision and proper implementation with a proper monitoring. The following points may be taken into account :

- (a) Courses or subjects introduced in vocational education should be updated regularly with innovative ideas to make them employable.
- (b) People in the society should be made aware of the advantage of the programme.
- (c) Institutions offering vocational courses should be provided financial assistance by the government to build up infrastructural facilities.
- (d) NGOs can also be approached for financial support in this regard.
- (e) Appropriate training programmes, refresher courses etc. for improving the efficiency of the teachers are necessary.
- (f) To make the profession attractive, comfortable salary structure should be given to the teachers of the programme.
- (g) Scholarships, loans and financial assistance (as and when necessary) should be provided to the students.
- (h) Facilities like workshops, seminars etc. should be enriched.
- (i) Institutes should be careful in opting subjects as vocational courses. Relevance of such courses in the locality or region as well as the scope of employability of such courses should always be kept in mind.
- (j) A sound industry (market)- vocational course relationship should be created to generate placement and employability and campus selection should be popularized.

Communicative English as Vocational Course:

(a) Communication—An Integral Part of Life: History tells us that communication is there since the creatures exist in the universe. Creatures on this planet need to express themselves and we find evidences of their communication patterns. Major part of human development and learning is formed by communication. Communication embodies a great deal of things. It is communication through which we share our ideas, information, perceptions, experiences and many more. Learning about society, life-style and profession is largely through communication. Hence, communication in every form is very distinct and measures of its effectiveness largely depend upon the communication objectives.

(b) Status of English: Modern scientific technology has changed the world into a global village. With increasing 'internationalization' English has become a 'global resource'. It has become 'lingua-franca'. English, now, does not belong to a particular society or community. English, once a 'Jini of the Elite', has become now the language of common man and the common means of communication between the people of different nations. Internationally acclaimed as a world language, English has become the language of trade and academics. It continues to be the medium of instruction at many universities. It is still the only medium for higher education specially in science and technology.

In India too, though Hindi being the 'Rashtrabhasha', only English knowing people in all parts and regions of the country can communicate with one another. The speakers of English in India even outnumber the speakers of some Indian languages. English seems to have become essential for social and career advancement. Surveys of public opinion have revealed that it is difficult to get a good job or do well in a career without being good in English.

(c) The Importance of Proficiency in Communication: Every young man and woman have the ambition of acquiring a working knowledge of the English language. Many social transactions in their life demand a good knowledge of English. Proficiency and fluency in English has become the prime consideration in almost every job. It has been a major asset for the sustainability, promotion and survival of an employee in his organization. It is because of this proficiency and fluency in English that have led to the mushrooming of English training institutes across our country.

(d) Present System of Education: Our system of education is not geared to the teaching of the language for communication. The kind of English that we teach in our schools and colleges is not up to the mark. English has been taught as a content rather than a skill subject. Mastering the 'content of language courses' becomes more important than learning to 'use the language'. Difficult words are explained, grammar rules taught and memorized. Many hours are spent teaching how to read and write

English, but, hardly any hour is spent in teaching 'how to speak it'. As a result, it does not provide the learners with the mastery of the language skills that is expected.

Our education-system has been such that apart from the very successful students specializing in different subjects, a vast number of students come out as graduates without any specialized skills. It becomes extremely difficult for them to get absorbed in the competitive job market. As such, to equip these students with some kind of qualification to find employment, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced 'Communicative English Course' or 'Communication Skills' at the under-graduate level which has brought a new dimension to the study of English mainly as a vocational subject. It may be considered as a stepping stone for better opportunities for employment in several vocational areas connected to the English language by equipping the students with proficiency in the language skills for effective communication capabilities.

(e) Communicative English--Need of the Time: Communicative English, a part of the recent method 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT), is based on and responds to the learners' communication needs. Its aim is to develop communicative competence in the learner. The 'Communicative English Course' or the 'Functional English Course' or 'Communication Skills' tries to help in enhancing the capabilities of the learners in using the language in different spheres of life. As for example, if a learner wants to join the fields like journalism, television or radio broadcasting, marketing and sales representative, receptionist etc. , the study of communicative English helps him to feel competent with the skills that the learner has mastered. It is communication skills that train the students how to speak, what to speak, when to speak, whom to speak etc. that are very much necessary in day to day life. Expressing their opinion about communicative skills Mc Donough and Christopher Shaw writes :

“Speaking is not the real production of written language, but involves learners in the mastery of a wide range of sub-skill which added together, constitute an overall competence in the spoken language.” (Mc Donough and Shaw, 2003)

The course which is to be taught should be designed in such a way that the students achieve the maximum proficiency in the language-skills and are capable of communicating effectively. The teaching material for this purpose should be prepared carefully so that students are able to learn the language needed to express and use them appropriately in different types of situations to perform different kinds of tasks. Tempo of speech, speaking grammatically correct sentence, phrasal pause, stress, intonation, pronunciation etc. are some of the areas where proficiencies of the students need to be enhanced. All these help in the overall understanding and use of the language by the students. Knowledge of English becomes meaningless if one is unintelligible to one's listeners. The following joke proves the importance of pronunciation:

“At a wedding reception, guests were surprised to hear that 'snakes were waiting for them in the hole'. They later discovered that 'snacks were waiting for them in the hall'.”(Chaudhari,5)

There is the need to provide suitable teaching and learning materials for this purpose. Better opportunities for fieldwork and proper practice of conversational skills as well as reading and writing skills should be provided. The UGC allots funds for the course to the colleges where this course is offered. These funds should be utilized properly for improving the infrastructural facilities. The services of the general English teachers may be taken after proper training provided with extra remunerations. Experts and scholars of this field should be invited for lectures. Their expertise should be sought. Workshops, group discussions, debates, interviews and seminars should be organized regularly. These will help the students in understanding the language skills and acquiring proficiency. To improve the confidence of the students to communicate better, emphasis should be given on error analysis and remedial grammar. In due course of time, when the course begins to function properly and its importance is felt by the students and the society as well, then permanent posts for the teachers of this course could also be created for better functioning of the vocational department.

(f) Teacher's Role: Like the student, the teacher himself is a variable factor in the scheme of teaching. His role as 'co-communicator' places him on an equal basis with the learners. To improve learners' communicative ability the teacher should be equipped with insight and be aware with the needs of the learners. His skill and personality are instrumental in creating the necessary condition for learning. Hence, he should be resourceful, perceptive, self-confident and able to set up the conditions for the activity to take place both on the physical level and on the psychological level. The teacher's language is the principal model for the student. As such, the teacher should be proficient in the language. His knowledge of and expertise in methods and techniques of language teaching should be of a reasonably high standard. To attain the objective of more effective teaching, a short-term training should be given to the teachers in service of the course. Classes of this course should be made learner centered so that the acquired knowledge of the teacher can reach to the receiving end. Dr Geetha Nagraj rightly says :

“The language learning and teaching process should be form based to meaning based, there should be a shift from teacher fronted to learner centered classes.” (Nagraj, 2008)

CONCLUSION:

Vocational education has not received due importance in India. As a result, there is a mismatch between the skilled manpower required and the skilled manpower available. Though millions of graduates come out of institutions every year, there is a huge shortage of skilled workers. This vast shortage of skilled workers and the problem of unemployment can only be fulfilled through vocational education. What we need is careful planning, successful implementation and social awareness.

Effectiveness of any course depends on its necessity and importance. With the advent of globalization, there is a

competitive world-market at our door-steps. As such, the importance of the vocational course and the need for communicating in English has gained tremendous importance. Hence, there can never be any overemphasizing its necessity in the changing world scenario.

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