INTRODUCTION:

Soft Skills training for young graduates is becoming imminent in view of enhancing their employability. Acquiring the competencies in soft skills has become increasingly important and very relevant for these young engineering graduates as part of exploring better job prospects. The Industry finds that the young engineering graduates are lacking or possessing a mismatch of soft skills competencies, which are the most relevant and the utmost required for job positions. The Local Companies and the Multi National Companies are looking for exceptional soft skills competencies among the young engineering graduates in the areas of a) communication skills, b) creative and critical thinking skills, c) team work, d) program & project management skills and e) decision making and problem solving skills. The companies give the utmost importance to these skills at workplaces. However, the Multi National Companies are prioritizing i) communication skills, ii) team work, iii) decision making and problem solving skills as the most sought after skills at workplaces. Even among these skills, communication skills appear the most needed skills at working environment.

CURRENT SCENARIO:

Consequent upon the effects of globalization on Industry, the recruiting agencies always complain that number of the employable Engineering, Science & Technology, Business and Management graduates continues to be low and it’s a very paradoxical situation. Though there are enormous job opportunities and abnormal growth in producing Engineering graduates and Management graduates in India by professional colleges, there is severe dearth of employable graduates to take up job tasks.
One of the reasons for such a precarious situation is the young graduates lack soft skills, leaving a serious threat to the economic boom thus affecting the effectiveness and growth of Indian talent pool that has been constrained owing to deepening soft skills crisis. Hence, the young engineering graduates need to acquire and practice generic skills, which are non-technical skills that are highly associated with employability. These generic skills can also be applied across a variety of subject domains, jobs and life contexts. The young engineering graduates are still lacking soft skills competencies and need a lot of improvements to meet the industry expectations. As per NASSCOM’s (National Association of Software Service Companies) report on employability reports, only 25% of these engineering graduates are found employable in India. The main reason for the unsuccessfulness at that high rate is owing to soft skills deficiencies. Whatever the technical education course they undergo at Academia is not final for these young engineering graduates, but still some more skills are needed to be acquired and practiced for a better going at Industry.

One of the reasons for this lacunae is that there is no scope for the undergraduates of engineering courses to approach any workplace during the period of their study. Hence there should be frequent Multi-layer Industry – Institution Interaction necessary with an industry collaboration for producing competent engineering graduates, suitable to Industry requirements. Such Industry collaborations will reduce the mismatch between the Industry needs and what the academia produces at the end of the course. This exercise shall enhance the competencies of young engineering graduates.

**Behavioral Soft Skills:**
The young engineering graduates need to acquire five behavioral soft skills prior to their entry into MNCs. They are:

1) **Effective Communication:** Communicating with peer, superiors and others is an essential factor to build rapport with them. This communication shall be in the form of verbal or written, e-mail or a random talk or exchange of ideas formally or informally either in a personal meeting or through a telephonic talk.
2) **Presentation Skills:** The young graduates should inculcate the idea of presenting thought through PPT to sell their skills and bring out what potential mettle they bear.

3) **Attitude / Personality:** The elements of positive thinking, not-giving up mentality, determination, able to learn from mistakes, being open to new and innovative diverse ideas, being responsible, being accountable – form as part of good attitude, which are necessary for the young engineering graduates to develop true personality.

4) **Decision Making:** Some of these young engineering graduates are aspiring to develop entrepreneurial competencies and for such people, making decisions based on facts and intuitions encompass the things like time management, being able to prioritize etc.

5) **Motivation Skills:** The young graduate needs to be a self starter. They need to set targets and deadlines constantly. Where do they get motivation from? How do they set targets and become go-getters? The young engineering graduates need to be self motivated to achieve professional excellence by all means for practicing soft skills competencies.

**Soft Skills Training:**

The young graduates shall be imparted proper soft skills competencies to enhance their employability. There should be a training programme to bring a comprehensive development in their personalities. The training topics should be very relevant and quite suitable to industry requirements. The current curriculum is so designed that only theory part of four language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking – is included. These skills should be learnt along with soft skills and then a change is needed in designing the curriculum so as to equip the learners to manage and excel at workplace. To get optimum results the curriculum should be restructured to cover the following areas to practice soft skills:

1. **Effective Communication Skills:** Verbal, Non-verbal, Pronunciation, removing barriers to communication, acquiring different communication styles.
2. **Business Presentation Skills:** Effective Presentation Skills, Negotiation Skills, Positive Thinking, Business Etiquette
3. **Behavioural Traits:** Attitude, Motivation, Time Management & Stress Management, Business Ethics, Leadership Skills, Interpersonal Skills and Team Building Skills.
4. **Problem Solving Skills**: Critical and Creative Thinking, Analytical Thinking, Conflict Management Skills and Decision Making Skills

The aforesaid areas need to be improved because; the MNCs are looking for the following practicing qualities among the young engineering graduates.

The Industry needs to address the following queries to meet the Industry needs:

1. **Strong work ethic**—Are they motivated and dedicated in getting the job done, no matter what? Will they be conscientious and do their best work?
2. **Positive attitude**—Are they optimistic and upbeat? Will they generate good energy and good will?
3. **Good communication skills**—Are they verbally articulate and good listeners? Can they make their case and express their needs in a way that builds bridges with colleagues, customers and vendors?
4. **Time management abilities**—Do they know how to prioritize tasks and work on a number of different projects at once? Will they use their time on the job wisely?
5. **Problem-solving skills**—Are they resourceful and able to creatively solve problems that will inevitably arise? Will they take ownership of problems or leave them for someone else?
6. **Being a team player**—Will they work well in groups and teams? Will they be cooperative and take a leadership role when appropriate?
7. **Self-confidence**—Do they truly believe they can do the job? Will they project a sense of calm and inspire confidence in others? Will they have the courage to ask questions that need to be asked and to freely contribute their ideas?
8. **Ability to accept and learn from criticism**—Will they be able to handle criticism? Are they coachable and open to learning and growing as a person and as a professional?
9. **Flexibility/adaptability**—Are they able to adapt to new situations and challenges? Will they embrace change and be open to new ideas?
10. **Working well under pressure**—Can they handle the stress that accompanies deadlines and crises? Will they be able to do their best work and come through in a pinch?

**Impact of Training:**

Today’s scenario in the academia gives a clear picture that many engineering institutions have identified the fact that Industry needs the entry level candidates who possess better soft skills competencies for good going in the workplace. Resultant upon this trend, the engineering institutions are doing very well, meeting the demand for English skills and English communication is identified as a crucially demanded skill at workplace. By and large the skill gap in English communication has moderately narrowed by a relentless effort by the academia. However, the professional institutions should not reduce their focus on developing better English communication skills among the young engineering undergraduates. Continuous practice sessions and consistent effort to acquire the soft skills competencies will alone bail out the young engineering graduates from the current troubles of getting a job and retaining the employment in the Industry.

**Conclusion:**

Soft skills training is otherwise enabling and empowering the young graduates with proper etiquettes and skills to get good going in workplaces. As Cologne (2002) states, “we (English teachers) should try to do our best in achieving two results simultaneously that are vital in view of the ever-changing ‘face’ of English: to enhance our students’ linguistic competence; and to prepare them for handling the extra-linguistic demands via soft skills.”

Thus, all the language teachers should rise as phoenix from the ashes of traditional method of imparting learning and switch over to modernity with respect to change in mindset, material and methodology, which will transform the classroom from teacher-centred learning to learner-centred learning to enhance the skill sets to suit to Industry needs.

For achieving this, a transition is very much required at the levels of framing syllabus, teaching methodology and teacher’s willingness to accept and implement change. The current scenario is like a wake-up call to language teachers which impels them to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of the industry.
Thus, the teachers of English should rise as a phoenix from the ashes of traditionalism and switch over to modernity with respect to change in Mindset, Material and Methodology.

References:

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