

**READINESS IS ALL: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACEMENT TRAINING IN THE PRESENT DAY**

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**Abstract**

*The final placement process with which any professional programme particularly MBA, concludes is always regarded with hope and anticipation by students and faculty-members alike. It is the final placement in a dream company that determines a student's eagerness or the lack of it to seek admission in a business school. Hence placement training has become the key lesson to learn for most students who are ardent seekers of their much desired career. This research proposes the approaches that are appropriate to the dependent styles needed early in courses in preparation as well as more independent and mutual strategies. There is an identified need to prepare students to develop more independence in general and facing key points of evaluation in particular. The first part of the paper will explore the components that are commonly included as a part of the placement training process, if at all they are offered. The focus then narrows down into the components that related to communication skills through the accurate use of English. The paper concludes with observations about what teaching strategies best delivers and inculcates the most desirable qualities in students so that they become both suitable and necessary to the requirements of the recruiters' organizations.*

**Keywords:** placement process, training, preparation, employability

The final placement process with which any professional programme particularly MBA, concludes is always regarded with hope and anticipation by students and faculty-members alike. It is the final placement in a dream company that determines a student's eagerness or the lack of it to seek admission in a business school. As a result, most business schools over the world have tried to lure students not only with their ability to collaborate and ally with the most desired organizations and working environments for their students but also offer recruitment training in order to satisfy and attract recruiters who come to recruit them and assess their abilities on various grounds. Hence placement training has become the key lesson to learn for most students who are ardent seekers of their much desired career. However the relevance of placement training is dual-faceted at the level of the students. From the point of view of the students it has been found that there is a bipolar stance. On one hand,

there are students who may or may not require such training but are willing to spend extra hours for such training even after long hours of their sessions throughout the day. On the other hand, there are students who are in terrible need for such grooming but are reluctant to spare additional hours in the campus for recruitment training.

The diversity of teaching approaches at present deployed appears to contain learning styles underlining the importance of using a variety of teaching strategies. This research also proposes that approaches that are appropriate to the dependent styles are needed early in courses in preparation for more independent and mutual strategies. There is an identified need to prepare students to develop more independence in general and facing key points of evaluation in particular. The first part of the paper will explore the components of soft skills that are commonly included as a part of the placement training process, if at all they are offered. The focus then narrows down into the components that related to communication skills through the accurate use of English. An attempt has been made to scrutinize the relation of English language learning and employability in the current job market. The paper concludes with some observations about what teaching strategies best delivers and inculcates the most desirable qualities in students so that they become both suitable to the requirements of the recruiters' organizations.

A key aim for placement grooming is to equip students with the knowledge and skills to contend in a competitive job market. If we also wish today's graduates to become tomorrow's efficient recruiters it is vital that they fully recognize the placement process along with its issues and challenges both at the level of the recruiter as well as the candidate. By undertaking career enhancement programmes, such vocational education and training should aim to address the twin challenges of employability and deployability that are being increasingly experienced across several industry sectors including the financial sector. Such training may be offered within the campus of the college or through a professional external institution.

In terms of size, Indian higher education system ranks the third largest in the world after US and China. Yet the competitiveness of higher education institutions is questioned, particularly when measured in terms of quality and global parameters of competitiveness. The performance of India in higher education and training, one of the critical dimensions of "competitiveness" evidently show the pitiable sight of the system. The situation raises a serious question why we have not been able to generate desired competitiveness in our higher education system despite the fact that in terms of numbers we are the third largest in the world. (Panda 19) One probable reason could be the inability to respond to the rapidly changing environment but that alone does not explain the situation completely.

Every diverse group of students hail from distinct backgrounds, academic standards and personal motivation, varied expectations from the course and different capacity to absorb the subject knowledge. The teacher has to prepare a common frame of reference and a teaching plan to cater to the needs of such students. (Dayal 24)

It can thus be inferred that the mainstream syllabus that is prescribed for a flagship course like an MBA does not address these issues in totality. Therefore the existence for placement training becomes imperative. Placement training, as proposed earlier should emphasize on two general components among other things: cultivating one's soft skills and strengthening communication skills.

Soft skills, grooming and personality development would include aspects like time management, self-disciplining, self awareness and self-assertion. This is not an exhaustive list of areas to be covered under such training but relevant diagnoses of the students through standardized tests can determine which area should be accorded greater emphasis, depending upon the weaker areas of the students.

Research shows that students at higher education levels require personal skills which support their technical expertise. Soft skills can be classified under 'core soft skills' and 'corporate soft skills'. Core soft skills include human attributes such as honesty integrity, consistency, determination, dedication and sensitivity towards human problems. Corporate soft skills consist of effective communication, delegation, negotiation, goal setting and team-building. Higher education curriculum should include soft skills training in the forms of lectures, projects, role-plays and various other participatory sessions to provide for students both effective, conceptual and experiential learning for the development of their personality. (Arunsimha, 2009)

Placement processes often include aptitude tests, group discussions, personal interviews, attendance of the presentation about the organization that is recruiting and so on. These exercises are founded on sound communication skills. Hence refining communication skills of students forms a large component of any kind of placement training. The aim of such a course should be to provide students with the language skills they need to enhance communication and comprehension at all levels. The components of the course should provide an inimitable edge and a competitive advantage to the students who are entering the employability bracket by boosting their morale and confidence and increases their chances of success in all spheres of life. Most notably it should help them secure their present and future and get them their dream job.

As a part of the preparation of the placement process students are often required to draft a CV that showcases their educational qualifications and their 'limited' work experience, if any, in a manner that is not only suitable for the recruiters but also seems attractive to them. As a result they should be trained to prepare their own CVs that is attractive, honest and yet well packaged. Similarly the students should also know how to engage in a fruitful correspondence with their prospective recruiters. This includes preparing and sending cold-call applications, responding to job advertisements in both print and electronic media including newspapers, radio, television and websites. Among these facing interviews, negotiations about salary, roles and responsibilities, conversations over the telephone for a follow-up and expression of gratitude and group discussions are a part of oral communication while drafting a relevant resume, preparing cover letters, emailing information about one's own self as the candidate are components of the written

communication. Interviews are regarded as the threshold of the corporate world. It has been pointed out that one's goal is to create a resume that shows one's best credentials, that provides strong details, that can be scanned quickly and that looks well-designed and professional. (McMurrey, Buckley 313)

For all these skills mentioned above some of the training components mentioned below should be included. Placement training focusing on communication may include skills for facing interviews, language skills, basic correspondence both oral and written, group discussion and basic aptitudes that the recruiters commonly look for in an ideal candidate.

Before any communication training commences, it should be unanimously agreed and recognized by the students that English is a global language. In India it has achieved the status of an associate official language. It is used in all formal occasions at the workplace. In order to be efficient at their workplace they should be able to communicate effectively. English is globally accepted as an international language and common currency to communicate across cultures and nations. However most of the core courses on communication skills and English as prescribed in schools and colleges stress greatly upon the theoretical aspects of the language and communication and ignore the practical components. As a result, students fumble with the language even after several years of formal training in the language.

In order to meet this end, valuable tips on pronunciation and intonation may be shared with the students during the placement communication training course. Students should be also made to practice speaking, listening, writing and reading through real-life communication activities. The course should also contain interesting activities and games to reinforce grammar constructs and vocabulary. Mock interviews, presentations, role-plays, meetings, telephone skills, debates are all possible vehicles for improving all round communication. Components focused on career advancements of students should include building the complete range of skills that include interview skills, CV writing, group discussions and so on. Emphasis on neutral accent pronunciation should also be adequately drawn in order to make their use of English language easily comprehensible all over the world—thereby making them “industry-ready”.

Although the components to be included in the placement communication training should be done on the basis of the requirements of the students, yet some basic components are usually considered to be inevitable. Some of these are described below: Business English training should help participants improve both their spoken and written skills so that they may be understood without any difficulty by people from various cultures around the world. The methodology should have a blend of presentations, practice, activities, assignments, evaluation and feedback. Effective business writing can be inculcated by developing good reading strategies and creating powerful presentations which again should focus on getting to the point by being precise, use of lists and framing effective questions. The tone of expression can be improved by choosing the appropriate conversational tone, punctuation, grammar and spelling, organizing thoughts, structuring paragraphs and sentences, writing to engage the reader completely and euphemizing a negative message.

While understanding the dynamics of communication, the participants should be made to understand how communication functions at the workplace, its significance at the work-place and it should enable them to communicate diligently and confidently. The focus of this component should be how to adapt communication to be more effective based on the target audience. Exercises and activities should aid participants to understand and improve body language, posture, gesture and all other forms of non-verbal communication including attire, develop effective listening and responding skills, comprehend the differences among active, passive and reflective listening, use positive reinforcement, develop skills of organizing communication which should also be concise, relevant and to the point and deal effectively with clients and colleagues. Certain issues about telephone etiquette may also be discussed with the participants laying the emphasis on paralinguistic aspects like inflection, pitch, tone, understanding, courtesy, accent and stress. This should also include learning effective probing skills, asking the relevant questions and dealing with complicated conversations. For conducting effective conference calls, learners may be taught to lay down mutually convenient ground rules like punctuality, making introductions, basic guidelines and mobile etiquettes. Similarly activities on team meeting etiquettes may be conducted to guide learners about meeting agenda, roles within a meeting—as a facilitator and attendees, writing minutes of meetings, meeting time-lines and meeting follow-ups. Depending upon the size of the group of learners, individual feedback can be offered to the learners about their communication based activities, exercises and other role-plays that they partake of.

The above-mentioned exercises and components can be worked in minute detail through areas like accent neutralization pitch correction, politeness in expression and accuracy of English language. This can be often be done through repeated practice in identifying and dealing with the influence of the mother-tongue in English language, pronunciation, pausing for effect and regulating the speed of speech.

No placement training is complete without practice sessions on group discussions and mock interviews which test a candidate's verbal and non-verbal skills, leadership and team-spirit, critical and logical thinking ability, problem solving skills and conflict resolution. A trainer often finds it challenging to motivate students to participate in a group discussion, particularly in an Indian scenario. He/She should not concentrate so much on what the students think but 'how' they think and express their ideas with relevant examples. For rigorous practice students may be given topics ranging from general subjects, current affairs to controversial debates and issues based on economics, politics, education, environment, social awareness, technology, sports and so on. Diligently conducted mock interviews can boost a student's self-confidence, increase self-awareness and help them to improve their self-assertion and negotiation skills. Feedback in this case should be double ended—at the level of the trainer as well as the learner's own assessment.

Although the phrase "Readiness is all" has been borrowed from Shakespeare's Hamlet wherein the protagonist reflects upon his readiness for revenge and the likelihood of his death, the broader sense of the phrase refers to a student's readiness or preparedness to

face the rigours of the placement processes and secure their dream job and become an ideal employee with the help of the required skills and attributes through such placement training. Since many students pursue an MBA programme after gaining some work experience in the industry they value such grooming all the more as it assists them immensely not only in conducting complicated transactions with difficult people smoothly but also helps them in making their work life balance sound. It further refines their interpersonal skills thereby making them more positive and pleasant. It should also be remembered that any form of communication is an expression of one's own behaviour which in turn reflects one's personality. Placement processes in the life of a student might be only a threshold from which a student needs to start proving his or her capabilities and potentials to the world that beckons them with multitudinous challenges and they should be poised to communicate how their competence can become indispensable assets to any discipline they choose to contribute to.

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