



Reimagining English Communication Skills for Employability in Higher Education under NEP 2020

Lahangma Lawati

Ghum, Jorebunglow, Rajahatta
Email: limbunilahang@gmail.com

Abstract:

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) envisions a future-ready higher education system that prioritizes employability through holistic, flexible, and skill-integrated learning. Within this vision, English communication skills emerge as a critical competence influencing students' access to professional opportunities in an increasingly globalized economy. This conceptual paper reimagines English communication not as a basic linguistic requirement but as an essential employability skill shaped by NEP 2020's guiding principles of equity, excellence, and sustainability. It examines how higher education institutions can integrate English communication with workplace-oriented competencies—such as academic writing, professional speaking, digital communication, and collaborative discourse—to address persistent skill gaps among graduates. The paper also highlights NEP-aligned strategies such as multidisciplinary curricula, experiential learning, blended modalities, and outcome-based assessment to strengthen students' employability. By situating English communication within the broader NEP mandate of transforming higher education, this conceptual paper proposes a refined, future-oriented framework for empowering graduates with the communicative and professional capacities required for meaningful employment and lifelong learning.

Keywords: *National Education Policy, English Communication Skill, Linguistic Knowledge, Digital Communication.*

1. Introduction and Conceptual Framework:

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a transformative vision for higher education in India, emphasizing holistic development, flexible learning pathways, and the integration of employability-oriented skills alongside academic knowledge. In a rapidly globalizing labour market, graduates must possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also strong communication competencies to succeed across diverse professional contexts. Among these, English communication emerges as a pivotal skill, enabling academic discourse, cross-cultural interactions, industry collaborations, and global mobility.

In this paper, English communication is reconceptualized as a strategic employability skill—encompassing academic writing, professional speaking, presentations, digital communication, and collaborative interaction—rather than merely basic language proficiency. The conceptual framework positions English communication as a mediator between NEP 2020's principles of equity, excellence, and sustainability and

the employability outcomes of higher education graduates. Accordingly, this study examines challenges faced by students, NEP-aligned strategies for skill enhancement, and implications for institutions and graduates.

2. Literature Review and Identified Gaps:

Existing scholarship on NEP 2020 emphasizes its role in reorienting Indian higher education towards holistic development, multidisciplinary learning, and employability-focused skill integration (Maurya, 2025). Studies on graduate employability further highlight the growing importance of soft skills, particularly English communication, in enhancing workplace readiness and career outcomes (Deshmukh & Kumar, 2025; Elkhayma & Ezzaidi, 2025). Research indicates that limitations in professional writing, presentations, and digital communication adversely affect graduates' employability, even when subject knowledge is adequate (Konale, 2023). However, much of the existing literature examines communication skills either as generic soft skills or as basic language proficiency, without explicitly situating them within NEP 2020's guiding principles of equity, excellence, and sustainability. Moreover, there is limited conceptual, policy-oriented analysis that systematically integrates NEP 2020, English communication skills, and employability in higher education. This paper addresses this gap by offering a NEP-aligned conceptual framework that reimagines English communication as a strategic employability skill.

3. NEP 2020 and the Vision for Employability in Higher Education:

NEP 2020 underscores the evolution of higher education from narrow disciplinary silos toward flexible, multidisciplinary, and skill-integrated programmes, aiming to bridge the gap between academic learning and employment outcomes. Its emphasis on vocational integration, internships, multiple entry–exit pathways, and competency-based curricula reflects a commitment to preparing students for dynamic labor markets. Recent scholarship on Indian higher education reinforces that employability today depends not only on technical or domain-specific skills but increasingly on soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and digital literacy (Maurya, 2025).

While NEP 2020 sets out broad policy objectives, translating these into effective employability requires understanding the specific skills graduates must acquire. English communication, in particular, emerges as a critical component of employability, supporting workplace engagement, collaboration, and professional mobility. By linking policy vision to practical skills, NEP 2020 positions higher education institutions as active agents in enhancing student outcomes and ensuring equity in skill development across socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds.

4. English Communication Skills: Beyond Basic Language Proficiency:

In higher education, English communication must be reframed as a multidimensional competence encompassing professional, academic, and workplace-oriented skills—far beyond basic conversational ability. This includes proficiency in academic writing, formal presentations, professional speaking, digital communication, and teamwork-based collaborative discourse. Research among Indian postgraduate students highlights that deficits in such communication skills significantly impair employability—even when academic credentials are strong (Deshmukh & Kumar, 2025).

Global studies corroborate this perspective, showing that soft skills—including communication, interpersonal interaction, and problem-solving—predict job readiness and early career success (Elkhayma & Ezzaidi, 2025). Consequently, professional English communication functions as a strategic asset: it enables graduates to articulate complex ideas, collaborate effectively, and navigate globalized professional environments. By understanding communication in this expansive sense, higher education institutions can design curricula and learning experiences that truly enhance employability.

5. Challenges in English Communication and Employability in Higher Education:

Despite widespread English-medium instruction, many graduates continue to face challenges in workplace-ready communication. Traditional curricula often prioritize rote learning and examination-focused instruction, leaving limited space for professional writing, presentations, or digital communication skill-building. This disconnect between academic training and employer expectations creates persistent barriers to employability (Konale, 2023).

Equity considerations further complicate the picture. Students from rural or regional language backgrounds, or from economically disadvantaged contexts, may have limited exposure to quality English-language training and soft skills development. This results in uneven skill distribution, undermining NEP 2020's goal of equitable access to employability resources. Understanding these challenges is critical before proposing targeted NEP-aligned strategies for strengthening communication skills and workplace readiness.

6. NEP-Aligned Strategies for Strengthening English Communication for Employability:

Operationalizing NEP 2020's vision requires embedding structured English communication and soft-skills development across curricula, particularly in multidisciplinary programmes. Integrating academic writing workshops, presentation modules, digital communication labs, group discussions, and internships provides students with authentic practice and exposure to workplace contexts.

Experiential and blended learning approaches—such as virtual collaborations, simulations, peer-feedback sessions, and project-based communication tasks—enhance skill acquisition, particularly for students with limited prior exposure. Technology-enabled platforms democratize access, supporting equity and sustainability in skill development. Outcome-based assessments and continuous feedback mechanisms ensure that students can track progress and refine competencies systematically.

Industry partnerships, mentorship programs, and internships provide real-world experience, aligning academic learning with workplace expectations. Research demonstrates that such integrative strategies significantly improve employment outcomes and early career success (Yan & Nasri, 2025; Karmaker & Hasan, 2025; Suhaili, Razak, & Deni, 2025). By connecting curriculum, pedagogy, and workplace practice, higher education institutions can operationalize NEP principles while developing graduates' professional communication skills.

7. Implications for Higher Education and Future Graduates:

Embedding NEP-aligned English communication strategies in higher education has far-reaching implications. Graduates equipped with professional communication and soft skills are better positioned for employment across diverse sectors, enhancing career mobility and adaptability. By emphasizing equity, institutions ensure that students from varied backgrounds gain access to essential skill-building opportunities, fostering inclusive growth.

Furthermore, strong communication competencies support sustainable employability: as workplace demands evolve, graduates with robust interpersonal, digital, and collaborative skills are prepared for lifelong learning and career development. Higher education institutions thus play a pivotal role in shaping a future-ready workforce, fulfilling NEP 2020's vision of equity, excellence, and sustainability.

8. Conclusion:

Reimagining English communication as a critical employability skill constitutes a transformative approach under NEP 2020. Integrating experiential learning, technology-enhanced pedagogy, soft-skills training, and industry engagement enables institutions to bridge gaps between academic knowledge and workplace readiness. Emphasizing equity ensures that students from diverse socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds can develop professional communication competencies.

By aligning English communication development with NEP 2020 principles of equity, excellence, and sustainability, higher education institutions enhance employability, promote lifelong learning, and prepare graduates to thrive in dynamic, globalized professional environments. Communication skills, therefore, are not merely foundational but catalytic, shaping the employability and professional success of India's future workforce.

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