

Fostering Soft Skills through ESL Instruction: A Strategy to Overcome Unemployment and Underemployment among Graduates

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Abstract - Recent surveys reveal that a greater number of undergraduates from the state universities in Sri Lanka lack soft skills and face challenges in seeking jobs and the majority of those who are already employed suffer from severe adjustability problems in their work places due to a conspicuous lack of soft skills. This implies that unemployment and underemployment among the graduate population could to some extent be minimized through the enhancement of their soft skills. Therefore, this study focuses on the significance of making undergraduates realize the importance of soft skills through integrating them in ESL instruction as English language proficiency itself is considered a soft skill today because of the crucial role it plays in interpersonal communication at both national and international levels. In order to investigate this situation empirically a questionnaire survey and a series of semi-structured interviews and discussions were carried out with 64 third year undergraduates from the Faculty of Arts in a state university, eliciting their views about soft skills and incorporating them in ESL instruction. The data gathered in this manner were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings made thereby show that the undergraduates do not give adequate priority to the soft skills although they are included in the curriculum and the achievement of soft skills in the undergraduates deserves more prominence in the university-level programs of ESL instruction.

Key words: Soft Skills, ESL Classrooms, Graduates