# Designing an Undergraduate Communicative English Curriculum Driven by Skill Development: An Experiment

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *A Curriculum basically is a set of guidelines or a course design, for different academic contents and chapters that are covered in a particular course or programme offered by a particular institution. However, it covers the attitude, manner, knowledge, behaviour, performance, and the different skills that the learners will develop throughout the academic period. Focusing on the overall learning experience provided by a course, it emphasizes essentially on the mental and physical development of the students. This paper aims at designing an undergraduate Communicative English Curriculum and its impact on acquiring the four skills of the English language in terms of an ideal blend of imparting accuracy (structures or functional grammar) and fluency in English in various contexts including professional skills. A curriculum that enables proficiency in presentation, public speaking, analysis. Thereby the expected learning outcomes can be stated in various forms such as knowledge, understanding, acquisition of skills, competence, process and experience. Secondly the process of proposing a learner-centred curriculum seeks credence in Blooms Taxonomy and its hierarchical components. And thirdly teachers as mentors, guides, motivators supporting students' academic and social development throughout their academics for it is the interactive bond between the teachers and students that creates a comfortable, safe, secure and conducive learning environment. And finally, to know that it's teachers' instructional quality that plays a significant role in the academic success of the learners and their life time outcomes. Ultimately, it's the syllabus that promotes the effectiveness of communication.*

**Methodology:** *The researcher conducted a survey with a designed questionnaire to investigate the effectiveness of current syllabus and to promote effective communication. A feedback was taken from the undergraduate level students who have taken Communicative English as one of the electives.*

**Results/Findings:** *The survey shows that strength of the class is not a major factor that prevents better teaching and learning. Though the communicative English enables students to improve their language skills it needs a revival at boosting the confidence of students.*

**Originality/Value:** *Given a training, the purpose of education, of a life- long pursuit could be achieved and enable the learners to be self-reliant and self-confident. The set goals require hard work and consistency in becoming a productive member of the society.*

**Research Type:** *It's empirical research*

**Key Words:** *Curriculum, Syllabus, Communication, Skill Development, Mastery.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Communication works for those who work at it are the words of John Powell. It takes time and vivacity to become an efficient communicator. When a person is equipped with the right skills to communicate effectively, it avoids conflict. According to Brian Tracy, "Communication is a skill that needs to be worked on over time, if you want to improve it." It's a strategy that becomes instrumental in acquiring the set goals and achieving profitable results [1]. Effective Communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know (Jim Rohn). It's an interpersonal process in which verbal symbols like words and non -verbal symbols like body postures are shared and understood by people [2]. It would be pleasing to the ear to hear from recruiters, that every outgoing undergraduate student showcases potential to be the cream of the crop in regard to their inter and intrapersonal skills, self-confidence and expertise. Effective communication is more than placing your thoughts in order and presenting them in a convenient way. It is communicating them in a manner that seizes the curiosity of the receiver 'Communication is more a matter of trust and acceptance of others, their feeling and ideas that are different and that from their point of view, have the same intellect.' (Ruck & Welch) [3]. Effectiveness of communication also is a function of individuals' abilities to manage their uncertainty and anxiety [4]. Communication is an asset that's at the disposal of every institution and must be yoked for the steadfastness of acquiring or obtaining the aims and objectives of utmost importance [5].

Teachers are the most important resource of an educational institution and are actively involved in attaining the desired strategic objectives to get the foreseen results. It is they who sustain a positive working environment and contribute to the richness of knowledge in producing intellectuals who can think and create. Briefly, they are the ones who ensure the long-term success of an educational institution. [6]. In this regard every individual of an organization namely the employees are the first to benefit from the results of the strategy because they are the ones who execute the tasks assigned to meet and attain the desired objectives [7]. A meticulous planning and a proper framework, or a draft are an essential requirement in all processes including education. And it's the syllabus that sets the parameters of the curriculum in order to instigate and initiate change. Undoubtedly it can be argued that implementing it effectively is the assurance of success. The lecture room should then be a venue to use words, exchange ideas, emotions, facts and information through signs and symbols [8].

### 2. CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS:

In an educational organization curriculum becomes the course in action and deeds that pushes individuals into a pool of experience. Curriculum and syllabus though important terms with reference to an educational programme they are often used interchangeably or mutually. But they are distinct.[9]. Then how can curriculum be defined as? Is it about the resources, intellectual or scientific? Does it remind us at once of text books and the availability of material? Does it take into consideration teachers, learners and classrooms or any other learning environment? Here is an answer. Great authors and writers have defined curriculum in this manner. Curriculum is simply what is taught and learned in schools (Kelly, 2004) [10]. It is the very constitutive cultural and scientific 'stuff' of education that is 'transmitted' by the message systems of instruction and assessment (Bernstein, 1990). The English Oxford Dictionary defines curriculum as, the subjects that are included in a course of study or taught in a school, college etc., So it is a systematic, purposeful, planned, progressive process to create positive improvements and healthy environment in an educational system.

If Curriculum can be termed or described as a blend or compound of the syllabus or course design, Syllabus is a unit of the curriculum, an official document that shapes and sets the parameters of the curriculum, in a particular place and time. In a classroom experience the syllabus might constrain and enable certain practices, methods, experiences etc., It is a known fact that written document cannot be the same as the lived experience of the teachers and the learners inside the classroom. The designed syllabus only becomes a guideline or frame work or an outline or briefly a summary of what is to be taught and is experimented by the teachers and students in a classroom. Westbury (2008) defines the syllabus as a 'guide' to the curriculum while Schwartz (2006) describes the syllabus as a "written curriculum" that acts as an action-oriented "guide" or "tool" for teachers [11] [12]. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that the term "syllabus" has evolved to refer to a "summary" of what is to be taught and learnt.

### 3. OBJECTIVES:

1. To enable the learners to gain mastery over the four skills of English language.
2. To enable proficiency in presentation, public speaking.
3. To know the importance of soft skills and professional skills.
4. To prepare graduates to a work place.

4. **METHODOLOGY:**

The module opted for research is empirical. The researcher has identified the current syllabus for Communicative English in one of the colleges as many colleges do not have Communicative English as an undergraduate elective. Secondly the researcher conducted a survey with a designed questionnaire to investigate the effectiveness of the current syllabus from the undergraduate level students' who have taken Communicative English as one of the electives. With the information already available and with a purpose to promote effective communication a skill-based, job-focused and morality driven curriculum is devised, which could then be further implemented in colleges.

5. **BLOOM'S TAXONOMY AND ITS HIERARCHICAL COMPONENTS**

Benjamin Samuel Bloom (February 21, 1913 – September 13, 1999) was an American educational psychologist who examined and then restructured the way teaching should be approached, to maximise learners' performance. His book, *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* (1956), set out a series of learning objectives that became known as 'Bloom's Taxonomy.' It continues to impact the way educational curricula are structured to this day. Bloom's taxonomy divided learning into three psychological domains namely Cognitive domain i.e., processing information, Affective domain i.e., attitudes and feelings and Psychomotor domain i.e., Physical skills.

Within these domains, his taxonomy progressed from Lower Order Thinking Skills to Higher Order Thinking Skills through six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Essentially, Bloom's model evolved education from being a case of learners just memorising information that's taught. then remembering it, understanding it, applying it, analysing it and finally being able to evaluate it at a complex level. Bloom's taxonomy was updated by former students of his in 2001, and the updated version is now widely used in all spheres of education. In 2008, a variation in Bloom's Taxonomy was created specifically for the digitally-enabled classrooms. And this new version is titled as *'Bloom's Digital Taxonomy: A reference guide for teachers.'* The table below is a simplification of the six cognitive levels and its understanding. It also makes a note on the interdependence of the six cognitive levels. So, this learner centred curriculum seeks credence in Bloom's Taxonomy and its hierarchical components [13].

5.1. **An understanding of the six cognitive levels of Bloom's Taxonomy**

**Table1: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy**

| The Six Cognitive Levels | An Understanding of the Six Cognitive Levels |
|---|---|
| Creating (Level 6) | The learner is able to create a new product or a point of view. It is to bring elements together to form a new, coherent and functional whole. |
| Evaluating (Level 5) | The learner is able to justify the decision and is able to make judgements based on criteria and standard. |
| Analysing (Level 4) | The learner is able to distinguish between different parts. It is to break information into constituent parts and to establish how it relates to each other. |
| Applying (Level 3) | The learner being able to use information in a new way. It is to implement what was learnt in Level:1 (Remembering) and Level:2 –(Understanding). |
| Understanding (Level 2) | The learner is able to explain ideas and concepts. It is to interpret and summarise information. |
| Remembering (Level 1) | The learner is able to recall or remember the information. It is to recall information from long-term memory. |

Bloom's Taxonomy is an interdependent learning process. It arranges learning into six cognitive levels in order of hierarchy and complexity, with all levels contributing to the final, holistic learning outcome. The logic used in the interdependence of Bloom's six cognitive learning levels can be understood as follows:

1. Before understanding the concept, it must be remembered
2. Before applying the concept, it must be understood.
3. Before analysing the concept, it must be applied
4. Before evaluating its impact, it must be analysed.
5. Before creating something based on the concept, that is the sixth cognitive level, the former five cognitive levels namely remembering, understanding, applying analysing and evaluating must be made thorough.

In the light of Bloom's Taxonomy, it is evident that it makes the learners active participants and it encourages learners to gain knowledge at a deeper and more interactive level, rather than just passively receiving or taking in the information. Society needs our skills, our minds, our resources. Teaching can produce individuals who in the course of time can inspire the society. There is always variety and mixed ability, as each individual is unique. There are ample opportunities to grow. We live in a society where we meet people, relate to people and interact with people. Therefore, education must and should become a powerful weapon that changes the world.

## 6. A STUDY OF THE CURRENT COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH SYLLABUS IN SELECT COLLEGE:

The syllabus that is being used in the college under scrutiny has the following papers

1) Introduction to English Language and Applied Phonetics
2) English for Competitive Examination
3) Creative Writing in English
4) Writing for the Media, Films and Advertisement
5) Technical Communication Paper 1
6) Interpersonal Communication and Event Management
7) Technical Communication Paper 2
8) English for Specific Purposes

A closer look at these papers would show that somewhat a comprehensive representation is made in the selection of topics and in their unitised syllabus. The purpose of the syllabus is to train the students in all aspects of communication taking into account the global demands and gainful employment. Keeping the above components in mind a survey was conducted with a designed questionnaire to investigate the effectiveness of the current syllabus from the undergraduate level students' who have taken Communicative English as one of the electives.

**6.1 Analysis of the Survey:**

A feasible study was undertaken on 91 students to identify components of an effective Communicative English syllabus and to mark key factors that affect its implementation. The respondents of the study were the undergraduate students in one of the colleges in Mangalore pursuing both triple and single major in different streams. The study dwelled on the topics of strength of the class tampering the active participation and also the hurdles in the teaching and learning process. The nucleus of the study was to determine the efficacy of the current syllabus, its implementation in the effectiveness of communicative skills of the students. The result of the survey is represented in the pie chart below with a brief analysis of the survey.
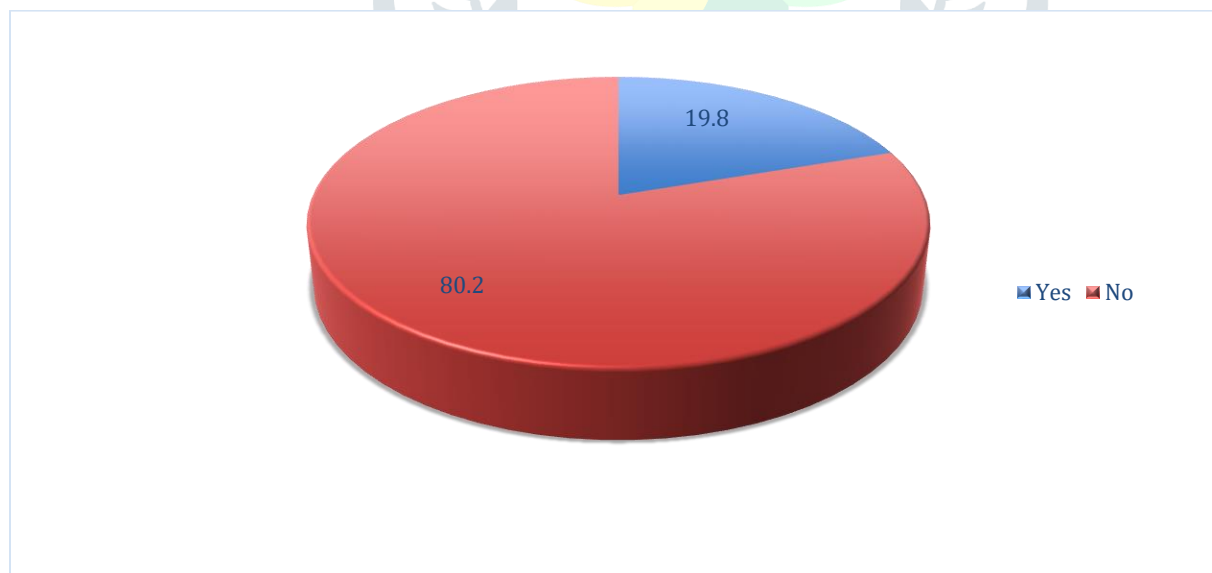


**Fig 1: The Strength of the Class and its Effects in the Learning Process**

Figure 1 is related to the idea that the strength of the class being a hurdle in the teaching and learning process. 19.8% of the respondents reckon that the strength of the class affects better teaching and learning of communicative skills. They are of the opinion of classroom strength resulting in lack of attention, tendency to get distracted easily, students with low self-esteem not being comfortable communicating, in other words being less assertive. The researcher could also identify the language differences experienced by these students. But 80.2% of the respondents opine that the strength of the class is not an obstacle for a better teaching and learning. And these respondents are who have had their

schooling in English medium schools. This data shows that strength of the class is not a major factor that prevents better teaching and learning.
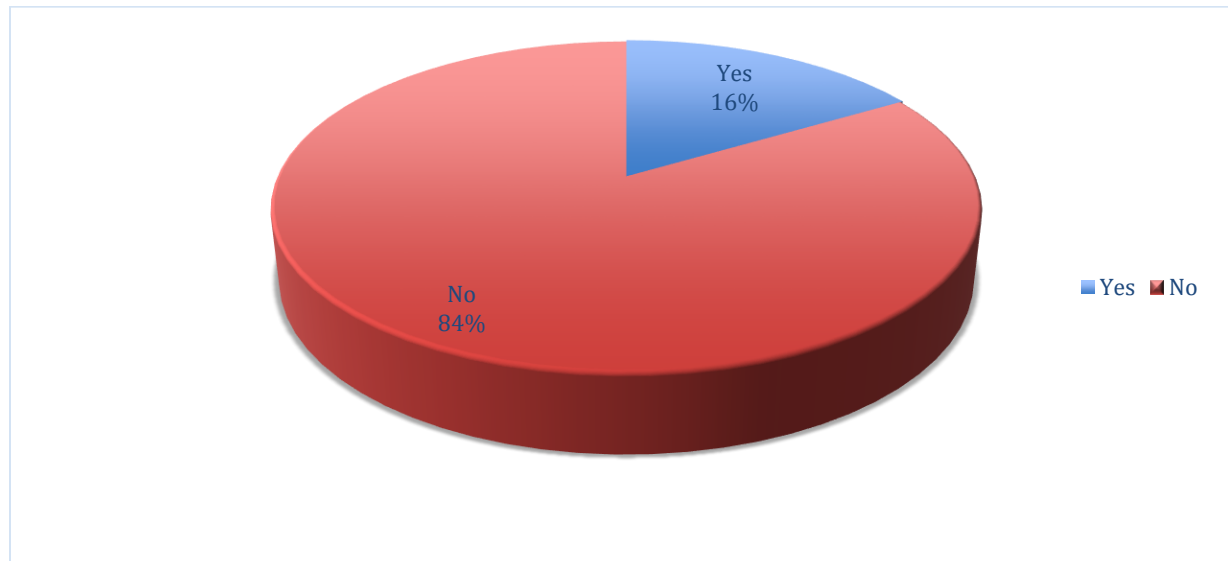


**Fig 2: Influence of Class Strength on the Active Participation of Students**

Figure 2 depicts whether the strength of the class influences the active participation of the students in the classroom. About 84% of the respondents observe that the large number of students in a class does not hamper the active participation. But given a chance for presentation learners do hesitate. The 16% of the students feel less confident to present their views on the given topics. This data substantiates that larger number does not influence the participation of the students.
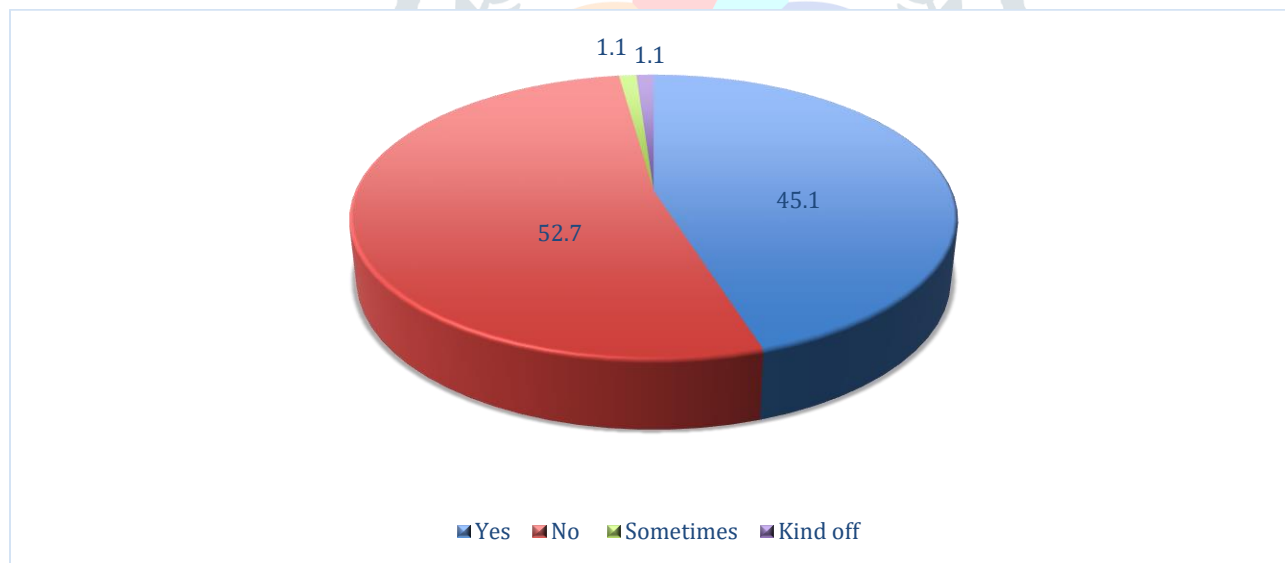


**Fig 3: Communication Skills and Campus Recruitment**

Figure 3 shows whether the students possess the effective communicative skills to face the campus recruitment confidently. About 52.7% of the respondents feel that they are not well equipped with the required communication skill to face an interview. Whereas about 45.1% of students opine that they are able to face an interview with confidence. This data points out a mixed outcome. Though the communicative English entails a student to improve at language it needs a revival at boosting the confidence of students. Given a training would definitely enable the learners to be self-reliant and self-confident.
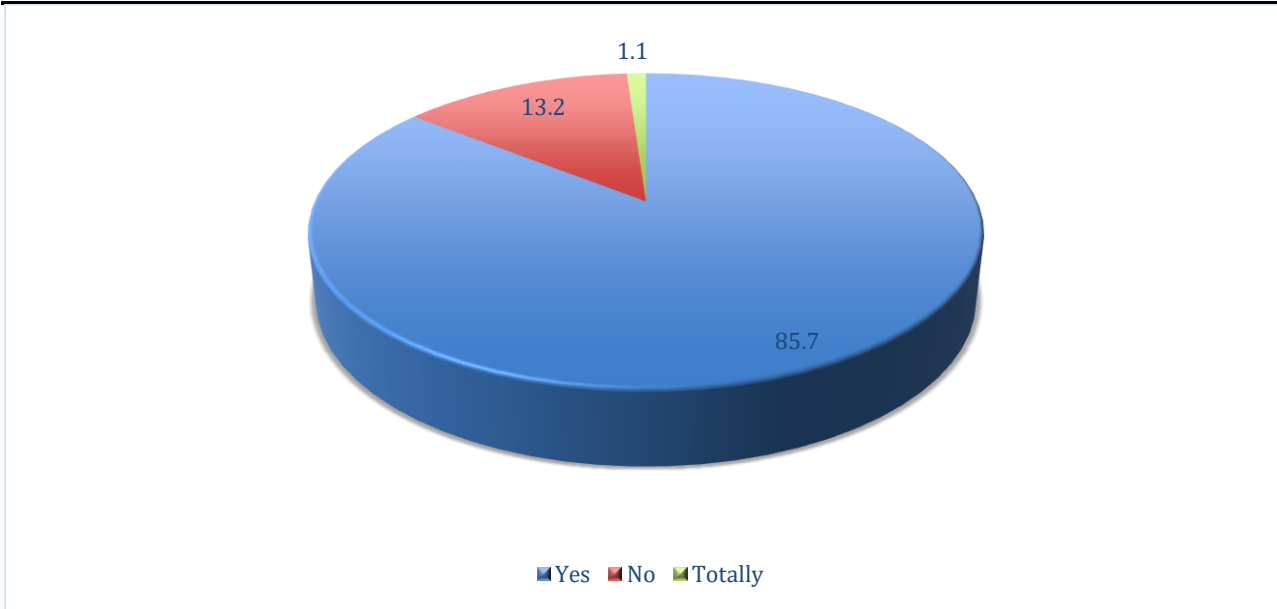
Yes    No    Totally

**Fig 4: Communicative English Towards Communication Skills After Grade 12**

Figure 4 shows the effectiveness of Communicative English among students. About 85.7% of students answered in affirmative about the subject. This data portrays that the students have benefited from the Communicative English Course. In a way it has encouraged the interest of the students to converse effectively. Learners opine that it has enhanced their listening skills also they have known the significance of giving importance to what they speak.
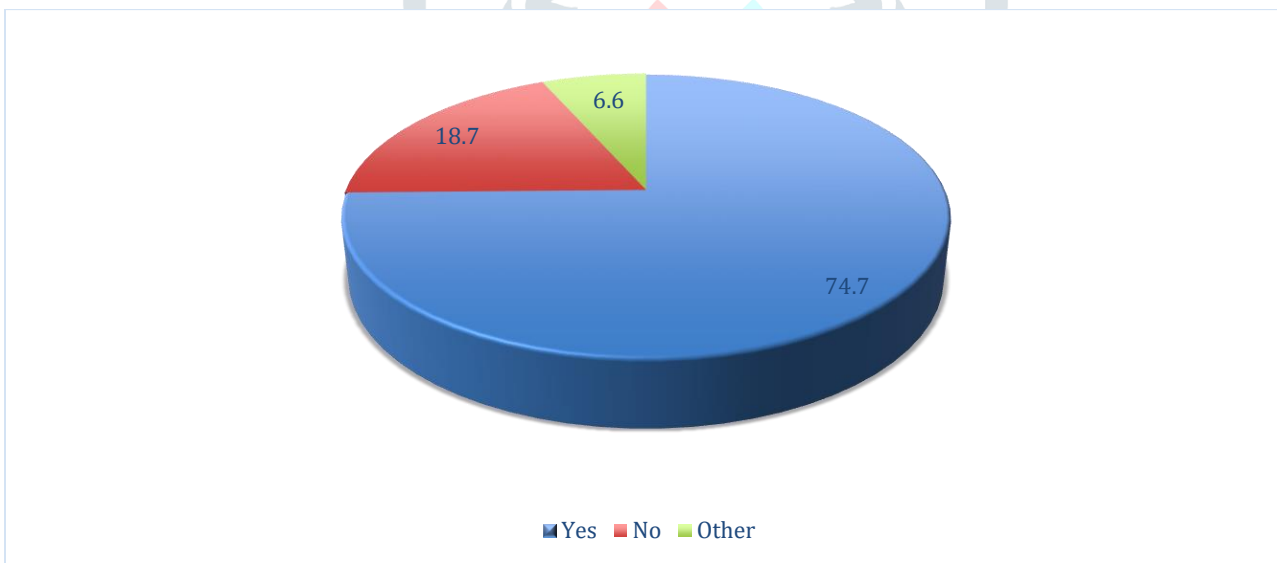


Yes    No    Other

**Fig 5: Relevance of Present Communicative English Syllabus.**

Figure 5 presents the relevance of the present Communicative English syllabus in fostering a better outcome among students. About 74.7% of the respondents assert the same, whereas only an 18.7% of respondents feel that the syllabus needs a relook. Their opinion is stated to focus more on the areas to write minor projects, to train them to speak, to teach them the writing skills and a training on soft skills.
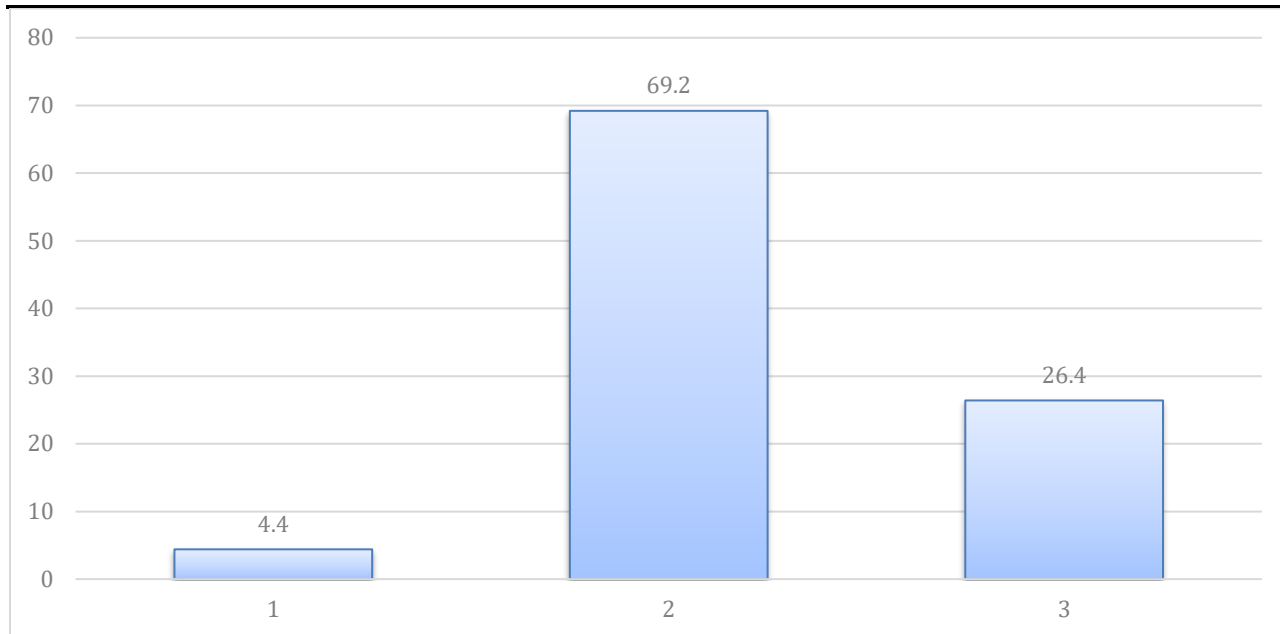
**Fig 6: Communicative English as a Major with other Majors**

Figure 6 shows comparison between Communicative English as Major against other Majors based on syllabus, opportunities, clarity, interest and self-growth. The scale of 1-3 being used, 1 being the lowest and 3 being the highest. About 69.2% respondents present a neutral response to the comparison. 26.4% also feels that communicative English would fare well as a Major judging it based on syllabus, opportunities, clarity, interest and self-growth.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The syllabus should evoke concerns with respect to the kind of proficiency and expertise the employment recruiters expect from the graduate students. A well drafted syllabus not only becomes an instructional aid but it shows consistency, between course goals and course requirements, that excites, intrigues, motivates resulting in positive student outcomes [14]. Having done a survey analysis it's been understood that given a training, the purpose of education, of a life- long pursuit could be achieved and enable the learners to be self-reliant and self-confident. The set goals require hard work and consistency in becoming a productive member of the society. Bearing this in mind a new syllabus is suggested that has the following titles. [15]

1. Introduction to English Language and Applied Phonetics.
2. Basics of English Grammar and Vocabulary.
3. Developing Professional Competency.
4. Effective Writing Strategies and Creative Writing.
5. Persuasive Writing and Speech Acts.
6. Technical Writing and Blogging.
7. Interpersonal Communication and Event Management.
8. Practical and Field Work.

### 7.1 Introduction to English Language and Applied Phonetics:

This paper for semester one, can aim at introducing the learners to the sounds of English, to the concept of morphology and morph phonemics, enhance LSRW skills in learners through advanced phonetics and could introduce the concept of word stress, sentence stress and intonation. This paper could encompass effective writing strategies, simple reading and writing exercises in the form of essays and dialogues.

### 7.2 Basics of English Language and Vocabulary

The paper titled, 'Basics of English Language and Vocabulary' can aim at developing the skills of grammar and vocabulary. The main focus here could be to develop competency in English, with the overall skills in the language, the main objective being to prepare students for competitive exams.

The first unit of this semester can focus on, the importance of vocabulary, improving vocabulary through word related games, affixes, synonyms, antonyms, acronyms, homonyms, homophones, one-word substitutes, idioms and phrases, list of phobias, commonly misspelt words. Unit two can include parts of speech, tenses, exercise and usage with subject verb agreement, types of sentences and its usage, degrees of comparison, clause namely independent and dependent, transformation of sentences. The third unit can comprise of strategies of paraphrasing, comprehensive passages with techniques of skimming and scanning, tone and style, passage structure, logical reasoning etc., followed by writing a precis, practical suggestions and essentials of a good precis.

### 7.3 Developing Professional Competency

The paper titled, 'Developing Professional Competency' could aim at developing language proficiency and effective presentation skills. The focus here is to develop better skills of interaction. Unit one of this semester can have drilling on academic essay writing, the types of essays namely descriptive, argumentative, narrative.  To enhance writing picture description, cartoon analysis, completion of a story with a given outline can be given importance. Second unit can focus on media and professional based writing. It can have sports reports, advertising products, mock interviews with celebrities, job application with resume and structure of research-based articles. Unit three can be on nature and importance of presentation, planning presentation, preparing a presentation, organizing a presentation, rehearsing a presentation.

### 7.4 Writing for Media

The paper titled 'Writing for Media' can aim at giving an understanding of language skills required for broadcast media, to introduce students to various genre of media writing also to introduce them to the techniques of reporting, reviewing, interviewing and commentary. Unit one of this semester can include fundamentals of broadcast media- understanding broadcast media, its elements, current events and its connection to news elements. This unit can also focus on qualities of news like being accurate, balanced, truthful, recent, exact, perfect, objective, impartial, unbiased, disinclined, concise and brief. It can also have components for writing for radio and television with emphasis on language of news writing or reporting. Unit two of this paper can take into consideration, book reviews- assessment of a book, in terms of subject, style and relevance, evaluative judgement, appropriate linguistic skills in terms of vocabulary, syntax. Unit three of this paper can include travelogues, Indian travel literature, their experiences of travel, glimpses of travel writing by Indian writers also emphasis on techniques of travel writing can be given.

### 7.5 Persuasive Writing and Speech Acts

The objectives of the paper, 'Persuasive Writing and Speech Acts' are to implement and cultivate the use of rhetorical devices in writing and speech, to illustrate the purpose of adopting these devices especially by acclaimed writers and speakers, to develop penmanship and orating skills to persuade any assemblage. Unit one can include introduction to rhetoric. Unit two can focus on different styles and techniques of creative writing. Unit three can emphasize on writing and speaking skills using figurative and rhetorical devices.

### 7.6 Technical Writing and Blogging

The paper titled, 'Technical Writing and Blogging' is mainly to prepare students to handle technical writing and be job ready in the corporate world. And to enable the learners to understand the need for blogging and its nuances. Unit one can consist of the technical writing process giving importance to templates and structures. It can also include, the technical writer's tool box. Unit two can be task oriented writing that is introducing the procedure, breaking down the task into steps, including the results, adding notes, warning and caution, using bullets and numbered lists, organizing information into tables, intersecting cross references etc., unit three of this paper can give importance to blogging, types of blog, a beginner's guide to setting up a blog, developing a network and relationship in the blogging, finally learning about avoiding mistakes in the blogging.

### 7.7 Event Management

The paper titled 'Event Management' can aim at training students to be future managers of the event industry. It can result in obtaining a sense of responsibility for the multi-disciplinary nature of event management and can gain confidence and enjoyment from involvement in the dynamic industry of event management. Unit one can emphasize on event and management, meaning, objectives, growth and development. Unit two can be on event planning, risk management, importance of net working to the event planner. Unit three can focus on special aspects of event management, licenses and permissions.

**7.8 Guided project**

The final paper could be on guided project. This is mainly to introduce students to the basic concepts of research, to initiate students into research that would lead to future research. Ultimately to develop the spirit of enquiry and systematic search into their discipline. The process would include introduction to the concepts of research, project title, review of literature, research gap, hypothesis, plagiarism and intellectual copy rights.

## 8. **TESTING AND EVALUATION**:

In the process of assessing, one should be very clear about what the learners are being taught. Questions can be knowledge based, comprehension related, questions related to analysis etc., As the paper has made very clear the six cognitive levels of bloom's taxonomy, from every level there should be questions while assessing. One of the best ways to make the assessing process interesting is to have one or two extra questions for learners to choose from. This would ultimately make students more confident while answering. The question paper pattern could include questions like answering in a word, phrase or sentence, paragraph answers, essay topics etc.

## 9. **CONCLUSION:**

Education is a process in which an individual is shaped [16]. It's a process of enlightenment, that creates an integrated individual, who has the capacity to deal with life situations. In this process of teaching, learning, giving and receiving systematic instruction, knowledge is gained and skills are acquired. Education breeds confidence, it is life itself our education should create individuals who become the best that they can possibly be [17]. As teachers we must make our students think because teachers have an opportunity to guide the learners, despite the lack of student' enthusiasm. Teachers have the capacity to direct their students, showing them the light at the end of the tunnel and take them forward. As teachers we must inspire change, rather than imparting only knowledge [18]. As a result of creating individuals who think, who create curiosity there can be a continuity in the learning process along with intellectual growth.

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