

**Integrating Soft Skills Training into ELT Curriculum: A Study on  
Employability Enhancement**

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**Abstract:**

In today's competitive global job market, graduates are expected to possess not only language proficiency but also a range of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms, traditionally focused on linguistic competence, can play a crucial role in addressing this need by integrating soft skills training into the curriculum. This study examines the impact of embedding soft skills within ELT on the employability of undergraduate engineering students in Chennai. Using a mixed-method research design, data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, questionnaires, and classroom observations. The intervention involved structured, activity-based learning strategies including group discussions, role plays, presentations, and mock interviews. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' communication abilities, confidence levels, and readiness for professional interactions. Students also demonstrated increased participation and positive perceptions toward the integrated approach. The study concludes that combining language instruction with soft skills development creates a more effective and holistic learning environment. It recommends the incorporation of experiential and student-centered methodologies in ELT to better prepare learners for real-world challenges and enhance their employability.

**Keywords:** ELT, Soft Skills, Employability, Communication Skills, Higher Education, Student Engagement, Task-Based Learning

**Introduction**

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone a significant transformation from traditional grammar-focused instruction to communicative and

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functional approaches. Earlier methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method, emphasized accuracy and rote memorization, whereas contemporary approaches highlight the importance of meaningful communication and interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This shift reflects a broader understanding that language learning involves not only linguistic competence but also the ability to use language effectively in social contexts. The concept of communicative competence, introduced by Dell Hymes, expanded the scope of language teaching to include sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of communication (Hymes, 1972). This perspective has influenced modern ELT practices, encouraging educators to focus on real-life communication skills rather than isolated grammatical structures.

In the 21st century, globalization and technological advancements have further reshaped the expectations for language education. Employers increasingly demand graduates who possess not only language proficiency but also soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving (Robles, 2012). These skills are essential for effective participation in professional environments and are often considered critical indicators of employability.

### **Context of Indian Higher Education**

The issue of employability among graduates has become a pressing concern in India. Despite producing a large number of graduates each year, the higher education system faces criticism for failing to equip students with the skills required by the industry (Rao, 2014). Studies indicate that a significant proportion of engineering graduates lack adequate communication and interpersonal skills, which adversely affects their employment prospects (Andrews & Higson, 2008). This gap between academic knowledge and industry expectations highlights the need for curriculum reform. While some institutions have introduced soft skills training programs, these are often treated as supplementary rather than integral components of the curriculum. As a result, students may not receive sufficient opportunities to practice and internalize these skills in meaningful contexts. ELT classrooms, however, provide a conducive environment for integrating soft skills training. Since language learning inherently involves communication and interaction, it offers a natural platform for developing interpersonal competencies alongside linguistic abilities (Richards, 2006).

### **Concept of Soft Skills**

Soft skills are broadly defined as personal attributes and interpersonal abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively with others. Unlike technical or hard skills, which are job-specific, soft skills are transferable across various domains and professions (Robles, 2012).

### **Key soft skills relevant to this study include:**

- **Communication Skills:** The ability to convey ideas clearly and effectively in both oral and written forms.
- **Teamwork:** The ability to collaborate with others in achieving common goals.
- **Leadership:** The capacity to guide and influence others.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** The ability to understand and manage one's emotions as well

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as those of others (Goleman, 1998).

- **Adaptability:** The ability to adjust to changing environments and challenges.

In the context of ELT, these skills can be cultivated through interactive teaching strategies such as group discussions, role plays, and task-based activities, which encourage active participation and collaboration (Nunan, 2004).

Rationale of the Study

The integration of soft skills into ELT is increasingly recognized as a pedagogical necessity. As English continues to function as a global lingua franca, the ability to use the language effectively in professional settings has become crucial. This requires not only linguistic competence but also the ability to communicate confidently, work collaboratively, and adapt to diverse situations. For engineering students, who often have limited exposure to communication training, ELT classrooms can serve as an effective platform for developing employability skills. By embedding soft skills within language instruction, educators can create a more holistic learning experience that prepares students for real-world challenges (Rao, 2014).

This study is particularly significant in the context of Chennai, a major educational and industrial hub, where graduates face intense competition in the job market. Enhancing employability through integrated teaching approaches can significantly improve students' career prospects.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the growing importance of soft skills in the job market, there is limited integration of these skills within ELT curricula in Indian higher education. Traditional teaching methods often prioritize linguistic competence while neglecting the broader competencies required for professional success. This lack of integration restricts students' ability to effectively apply their language skills in real-world contexts, thereby impacting their employability (Robles, 2012). Thus, the study aims to: Examine the role of ELT in developing soft skills among students. Assess the impact of integrating soft skills training on employability. Analyze improvements in students' communication and confidence levels. Propose effective strategies for incorporating soft skills into ELT curricula.

### **Literature Review**

The integration of soft skills into English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained increasing attention in recent years due to the evolving demands of the global job market. While traditional ELT focused primarily on linguistic competence, contemporary approaches emphasize the development of communicative and interpersonal skills that enhance employability. This section reviews key theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and contextual research relevant to soft skills integration in ELT.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Communicative Competence**

The concept of communicative competence, introduced by Dell Hymes, marked a

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paradigm shift in language teaching by emphasizing the social and functional aspects of language use (Hymes, 1972). Unlike earlier models that prioritized grammatical accuracy, communicative competence includes sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies necessary for effective communication. Later, Canale and Swain (1980) expanded this framework by identifying four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. This model underscores that language learning must go beyond structural knowledge to include the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts. The relevance of communicative competence to soft skills development is evident, as both involve interaction, negotiation of meaning, and adaptability. ELT classrooms that adopt communicative approaches inherently promote skills such as teamwork, confidence, and interpersonal communication.

### **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) focuses on the use of meaningful tasks to facilitate language learning (Nunan, 2004). Tasks such as problem-solving activities, role plays, and group discussions simulate real-life situations and encourage learners to use language for authentic purposes. Ellis (2003) argues that TBLT enhances both fluency and accuracy by engaging learners in communicative tasks that require collaboration and critical thinking. These tasks also provide opportunities for developing soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and decision-making. In the context of employability, TBLT aligns well with industry expectations, as it prepares students to handle real-world communication challenges. By integrating soft skills into task-based activities, ELT can create a more holistic learning environment.

### **Soft Skills and Employability**

Soft skills have become a crucial determinant of employability in the modern workforce. According to Robles (2012), employers prioritize attributes such as communication, integrity, teamwork, and adaptability over technical knowledge alone. Similarly, Andrews and Higson (2008) found that graduates with strong interpersonal skills are more likely to succeed in professional environments. The significance of soft skills is further highlighted by Goleman (1998), who emphasizes the role of emotional intelligence in workplace success. Emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, is essential for effective communication and collaboration. In the context of higher education, the lack of soft skills among graduates has been identified as a major barrier to employability (Rao, 2014). This gap underscores the need for integrating soft skills training into academic curricula, particularly in disciplines where communication training is limited.

### **ELT and Soft Skills Integration**

The integration of soft skills into ELT is supported by several pedagogical approaches. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), for instance, emphasizes interaction and learner participation, which naturally foster soft skills development (Richards, 2006). Similarly, collaborative learning strategies encourage students to work in groups, thereby enhancing teamwork and interpersonal communication. Research indicates that classroom activities such

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as role plays, presentations, and group discussions are effective in developing both language proficiency and soft skills (Nunan, 2004). These activities provide students with opportunities to practice real-life communication, build confidence, and develop critical thinking skills. Moreover, experiential learning approaches, which involve learning through experience and reflection, have been found to be particularly effective in soft skills development (Kolb, 1984). By engaging students in practical tasks, ELT can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

### **Studies in the Indian Context**

In India, the issue of employability has been widely discussed in academic and policy circles. Studies reveal that a significant proportion of graduates, particularly from engineering backgrounds, lack the communication and interpersonal skills required by employers (Rao, 2014). Research by Aspiring Minds (2019) reports that only a small percentage of engineering graduates are employable in core sectors, primarily due to deficiencies in soft skills. Similarly, NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) has emphasized the need for industry-relevant skills, including communication and teamwork. Several studies have explored the role of ELT in addressing this gap. For instance, Mishra (2016) highlights the importance of integrating communication skills training into language classrooms to enhance employability. However, the implementation of such integration remains inconsistent across institutions. In the context of Tamil Nadu, where engineering education is highly prominent, the need for soft skills training is particularly acute. ELT classrooms in this region can play a crucial role in preparing students for the competitive job market by incorporating skill-based learning strategies.

### **Research Gap**

Despite the growing body of literature on ELT and employability, there is a lack of empirical studies that specifically examine the integration of soft skills within ELT classrooms in the Indian context. While previous research has acknowledged the importance of soft skills, few studies have provided a structured framework for integrating these skills into language teaching. Additionally, there is limited research on the effectiveness of such integration in improving employability outcomes among engineering students. This study seeks to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on the impact of soft skills integration in ELT and proposing practical strategies for implementation.

The literature reviewed in this section highlights the importance of integrating soft skills into ELT to enhance employability. Theoretical frameworks such as communicative competence and TBLT provide a strong foundation for this integration, while empirical studies underscore the significance of soft skills in professional success. However, the lack of context-specific research and structured implementation strategies indicates a need for further investigation. This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the integration of soft skills in ELT within the Indian higher education context and assessing its impact on employability.

### **Methodology**

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This study adopts a systematic research methodology to examine the impact of integrating soft skills training into the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum on students' employability. A mixed-method approach was employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of both measurable outcomes and learner perceptions. This section outlines the research design, participants, instruments, intervention procedures, and methods of data analysis.

### **Research Design**

The study follows a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was selected to capture not only the measurable improvement in students' communication skills but also their perceptions and experiences during the intervention. Pre-test and post-test scores were used to measure improvement in communication skills and employability readiness. Classroom observations and student feedback were analyzed to understand behavioral changes, confidence levels, and engagement. Mixed-method research is widely recommended in educational studies as it allows for triangulation of data, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### **Participants**

The participants of the study consisted of:

- Total Number: 60 undergraduate students
- Discipline: Engineering
- Year of Study: First-year students
- Age Group: 17–19 years

The participants were selected from Engineering Colleges in Chennai. These students were chosen because they represent a group that typically requires enhancement in communication and soft skills for employability. The study employed a convenience sampling method, as the participants were selected based on accessibility and availability within the institution. Although this method may limit generalizability, it is commonly used in classroom-based research due to practical constraints (Etikan et al., 2016).

### **Instruments for Data Collection**

Multiple tools were used to collect data, ensuring methodological triangulation:

#### **Pre-Test and Post-Test**

- Designed to assess communication skills
- Included components such as:
  - Self-introduction
  - Short speaking tasks
  - Basic writing exercises

The tests were evaluated based on fluency, coherence, vocabulary, and confidence.

#### **Questionnaire**

A structured questionnaire was administered to gather students' perceptions of the intervention.

- Format: Likert scale (1–5)

- Areas covered:
  - Confidence in communication
  - Participation in class activities
  - Perceived improvement in employability skills

#### Observation Checklist

The researcher used an observation checklist to record:

- Student participation
- Interaction levels
- Body language and confidence
- Teamwork and collaboration

#### Informal Feedback

Students were encouraged to share their experiences and reflections on the activities, providing qualitative insights into the effectiveness of the intervention.

#### Intervention Design

The intervention was designed to integrate soft skills training into regular ELT sessions over a period of 6 weeks.

#### Duration

- Total Duration: 6 weeks
- Sessions per Week: 3
- Session Length: 60 minutes

#### Instructional Strategies

The following activity-based strategies were implemented:

##### Group Discussions

- Topics related to current issues and professional scenarios
- Focus on teamwork, articulation, and listening skills

##### Role Plays

- Simulated workplace situations
- Emphasis on communication, problem-solving, and adaptability

##### Presentations

- Individual and group presentations
- Focus on confidence, organization, and clarity

##### Mock Interviews

- Simulated job interviews
- Training in self-introduction, answering questions, and body language

##### Resume Building

- Basic guidance on professional writing
- Emphasis on clarity and presentation

#### Pedagogical Approach

The intervention was based on:

- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
- Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

These approaches emphasize learner-centered instruction, interaction, and real-life communication (Richards, 2006; Nunan, 2004).

#### Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was carried out in the following stages:

1. Pre-TestAdministration:  
Conducted before the intervention to assess baseline skills
2. ImplementationofIntervention:  
Soft skills integrated into ELT sessions over 6 weeks
3. ContinuousObservation:  
Classroom behavior and participation were recorded
4. Post-TestAdministration:  
Conducted after intervention to measure improvement
5. QuestionnaireDistribution:  
Collected student feedback on effectiveness

#### Data Analysis Techniques

- Comparison of pre-test and post-test scores
- Use of:
  - Mean
  - Percentage
  - Improvement rate
- Thematic analysis of:
  - Student feedback
  - Observation notes

This approach helps in identifying patterns related to confidence, engagement, and skill development (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research practices:

- Informed consent was obtained from participants
- Confidentiality of student data is maintained
- Participation was voluntary
- No harm or bias is involved in the research process

#### **Data Analysis and Results**

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected to examine the impact of integrating soft skills training into the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum. The analysis is divided into two major components: quantitative analysis (pre-test and post-test scores, questionnaire responses) and qualitative analysis (classroom observations and student feedback). The findings are aligned with the research objectives and questions outlined in the earlier sections.

#### **Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, students' communication skills were assessed before and after the implementation of soft skills training.

Table 1 presents the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores.

Skill Component	Pre-Test Mean (%)	Post-Test Mean (%)	Improvement (%)
Fluency	52	74	+22
Vocabulary Usage	55	76	+21
Confidence Level	48	78	+30
Coherece	50	73	+23

**Interpretation**

The data indicate a significant improvement across all skill components. The highest improvement was observed in confidence level (+30%), suggesting that the intervention effectively enhanced students’ self-assurance in communication. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of interactive activities in building confidence (Nunan, 2004). The improvement in fluency and vocabulary also reflects the effectiveness of communicative and task-based approaches, which encourage active language use rather than passive learning (Richards, 2006).

**Overall Performance Improvement**

Table 2 shows the overall performance comparison:

Category	Pre-Test Average (%)	Post-Test Average (%)
Overall Score	51.25	75.25

**Interpretation**

The overall improvement of approximately 24% demonstrates that integrating soft skills into ELT has a positive impact on students’ communicative competence and employability readiness. This supports the argument that language learning becomes more effective when combined with practical skill development.

**Questionnaire Analysis**

A structured questionnaire was administered to assess students’ perceptions of the intervention.

**Student Responses**

Table 3 summarizes key responses:

Statement	Agree (%)
The activities improved my communication skills	88%
I feel more confident speaking in English	85%
The sessions helped me prepare for job interviews	80%
Group activities improved my teamwork skills	82%
The teaching method was more engaging than traditional methods	90%

**Interpretation**

The majority of students responded positively to the integration of soft skills into ELT. Notably:

- 90% found the method more engaging, indicating the effectiveness of interactive pedagogy.

- 85% reported increased confidence, reinforcing the findings from the test results.
- 80% felt better prepared for interviews, highlighting the practical relevance of the intervention.

These findings are consistent with Robles (2012), who emphasizes the importance of communication and interpersonal skills in employability.

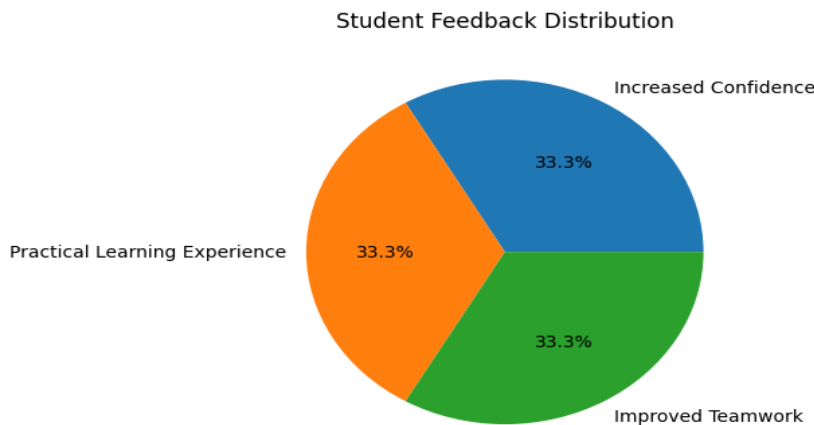
**Classroom Observations**

The observation checklist revealed several key behavioral changes:

- Increased student participation in classroom activities
- Improved willingness to speak in English
- Enhanced interaction among peers
- Better body language and eye contact during presentations

Students who were initially hesitant gradually became more active participants, particularly during group discussions and role plays.

Fig. 1. Student Feedback



**Interpretation**

These classroom observations support the quantitative data, indicating that the integration of soft skills not only improves measurable performance but also enhances students’ attitudes and engagement. The use of experiential learning strategies contributed significantly to these outcomes (Kolb, 1984).

**Key Findings**

Based on the analysis, the study reveals the following major findings:

1. **Significant Improvement in Communication Skills:**  
Students demonstrated measurable progress in fluency, vocabulary, coherence, and confidence.
2. **Enhanced Employability Readiness:**  
Activities such as mock interviews and presentations prepared students for real-world

job scenarios.

3. **Positive Student Perception:**

The majority of students found the integrated approach engaging and beneficial.

4. **Increased Classroom Participation:**

Interactive methods encouraged active involvement and reduced hesitation.

5. **Development of Interpersonal Skills:**

Teamwork and collaboration improved through group-based activities.

These results clearly indicate that integrating soft skills training into ELT has a substantial positive impact on students' overall development. The combination of communicative and task-based approaches creates a dynamic learning environment that enhances both language proficiency and employability skills.

### **Discussion**

This section interprets the findings presented in the previous section in relation to the research objectives, research questions, and existing literature. The discussion highlights how integrating soft skills into English Language Teaching (ELT) contributes to enhancing students' communicative competence and employability. It also situates the findings within established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies. The results of the study indicate a significant improvement in students' communication skills, confidence levels, and overall employability readiness. The increase in post-test scores across all skill components demonstrates that the integration of soft skills training into ELT has a measurable and positive impact.

One of the most notable findings is the substantial improvement in students' confidence. This suggests that interactive and student-centered activities such as role plays, group discussions, and mock interviews create a supportive learning environment that reduces anxiety and encourages participation. This aligns with the findings of Nunan (2004), who emphasizes the importance of meaningful interaction in language learning. Furthermore, the improvement in fluency and coherence indicates that students were able to use language more effectively in communicative contexts. This supports the argument that language learning is most effective when it is embedded in real-life tasks rather than isolated drills (Richards, 2006).

The findings strongly support the concept of communicative competence proposed by Dell Hymes, which emphasizes the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts (Hymes, 1972). The observed improvement in students' interaction, confidence, and contextual language use reflects the development of not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence.

The activities implemented during the intervention, such as group discussions and role plays, provided opportunities for students to negotiate meaning and adapt their language according to different situations. This demonstrates that ELT classrooms can effectively foster

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communicative competence when they incorporate interactive and experiential learning strategies.

The results also validate the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), as advocated by David Nunan (Nunan, 2004). The use of tasks such as presentations and mock interviews enabled students to engage in authentic communication, thereby enhancing both language proficiency and soft skills. Ellis (2003) argues that task-based learning promotes fluency and encourages learners to focus on meaning rather than form. The findings of this study support this claim, as students demonstrated improved fluency and confidence after participating in task-based activities.

### **Soft Skills and Employability**

The study confirms that soft skills play a crucial role in enhancing employability. The positive student responses to activities such as mock interviews and group discussions indicate that these experiences helped them prepare for real-world professional situations. This aligns with the findings of Robles (2012), who identifies communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills as essential attributes for workplace success. Similarly, Andrews and Higson (2008) emphasize that employers value graduates who possess strong soft skills in addition to technical knowledge. The improvement in students' ability to present themselves confidently and interact effectively suggests that ELT classrooms can serve as a bridge between academic learning and professional requirements. By integrating soft skills into language teaching, educators can address the employability gap identified in previous studies (Rao, 2014).

The questionnaire results reveal that students responded positively to the integrated teaching approach. A majority of students found the sessions engaging and reported increased confidence in communication. This indicates that interactive and activity-based learning methods are more effective than traditional lecture-based approaches. The increase in classroom participation observed during the intervention further supports this conclusion. Students who were initially reluctant to speak became more active participants over time, suggesting that the learning environment played a significant role in reducing anxiety and fostering confidence. This finding is consistent with experiential learning theory, which posits that learning is most effective when students actively engage in the learning process (Kolb, 1984). By providing opportunities for practice and reflection, the intervention enabled students to internalize both language skills and soft skills.

### **Implications for ELT Practice**

The findings of this study have important implications for ELT pedagogy. First, they highlight the need to move beyond traditional methods that focus solely on grammar and vocabulary. Instead, ELT should adopt a more holistic approach that integrates language learning with skill development. Second, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of communicative and task-based approaches in fostering both linguistic and interpersonal competencies. Teachers should incorporate activities such as role plays, group discussions,

and presentations into their teaching to create a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment. Third, the integration of soft skills into ELT can contribute to addressing the employability challenges faced by graduates, particularly in the Indian context. By aligning language teaching with industry requirements, educators can enhance students' readiness for the job market.

Overall, the research highlights that:

- Integrating soft skills into ELT significantly improves communication and confidence
- The findings support key theoretical frameworks such as communicative competence and TBLT
- Soft skills development enhances employability readiness
- Students respond positively to interactive and experiential learning methods

The results reinforce the need for a pedagogical shift towards integrated and skill-based language teaching. The findings of this study have significant implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) in higher education, particularly in the Indian context. The study highlights the need to redesign ELT curricula to incorporate soft skills as an integral component rather than as an optional add-on. Language courses should include structured modules that focus on communication, teamwork, leadership, and employability skills. Embedding these elements within the curriculum ensures that students receive continuous and contextualized exposure to skill development (Richards, 2006).

#### Teaching Strategies

The success of the intervention demonstrates the effectiveness of student-centered and activity-based learning approaches. Teachers should adopt methods such as:

- Group discussions
- Role plays
- Presentations
- Mock interviews

These strategies promote interaction, engagement, and real-life application of language skills. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) provide suitable frameworks for implementing such practices (Nunan, 2004).

#### Assessment Practices

Traditional assessment methods that focus solely on written examinations are insufficient to evaluate students' communicative competence and soft skills. Therefore, assessment should be diversified to include:

- Continuous evaluation
- Performance-based assessment
- Peer and self-assessment

Such methods enable a more comprehensive evaluation of students' abilities and encourage active participation in the learning process.

#### Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that integrating soft skills training into ELT significantly enhances students' communication abilities, confidence, and employability

readiness. By combining language instruction with experiential and task-based learning, ELT classrooms can serve as effective platforms for holistic student development. The findings reinforce the importance of moving beyond traditional teaching methods and adopting a more integrated approach that aligns with the demands of the modern workforce. As globalization continues to reshape professional landscapes, the role of ELT in preparing students for real-world challenges becomes increasingly crucial. In conclusion, the integration of soft skills into ELT is not merely an educational innovation but a necessity for producing competent, confident, and employable graduates.

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