

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

THE ROLE OF ORATORS' CLUB IN SHAPING ENGINEERING GRADUATES:  
A PRACTICAL APPROACH TOWARDS A HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." --Helen Keller  
It is this thought that provides impetus for like-minded people to come together to form a club that not only caters to the needs of its members but also to the larger community. A literary club is one such body which provides a positive sharing and learning environment. The Orators' Club, Muffakham Jah College of Engineering and Technology (MJCET) was established with the objectives of grooming the engineering students not only to develop English communication skills but also to widen their horizons and scope of knowledge, equip them with better social etiquette and manners, help them realize their potential and hidden talents, thus making them confident, well-rounded personalities since one who is able to voice one's ideas confidently and with clarity, is a good listener and a team player, is open to self paced experiential learning, is an asset in the competitive world of today – all these are facilitated by establishing a club mentored by the English language faculty.

**Key Words:** Orators' club, communication skills, soft skills, personality development

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Students pursuing professional courses are often found lacking in communication and employability skills. According to the fourth edition of the Nation Employability Report for Engineers (2016) Prepared by Aspiring Minds, a New Delhi based employment solutions organization, less than one out of four engineering graduates are employable. The survey has found other 1.2 lakh candidates surveyed across multiple states, 91.82% lack programming and algorithm skills, **71.23% lack soft and cognitive skills**, 60% lack domain skills, **73.63% lack English speaking and comprehension skills** and 57.96% have poor analytical and quantitative skills."The low employability among engineering graduates is a cumulative outcome of

poor education standards and higher demand of skilled employees, creating a drastic skill gap in the country," said Himanshu Aggarwal, co-founder and CEO of Aspiring Minds, which released the report.

Among the many reasons for this bleak picture could be a lack of sufficient emphasis given to the importance for communication and soft skills, students' lack motivation and insufficient practice in language skills, which in turn result in students poor performance in academics and later, in interviews. One of the strategies to bridge this yawning gap is for colleges to establish a club that focuses on enhancing English language skills, be it a Public Speaking Club or Literary Club under the auspices of their English Department. This paper

discusses the benefits accrued by the Orators' Club established by the Dept of English, MJCET which was formed with the objective of providing students an opportunity to hone their English communication, interpersonal and other soft skills.

The English Language lab provides an opportunity to develop all the LSRW skills in the first year of the engineering course. Being an Osmania University affiliated college, students, as of now, have English only during their first year of engineering (unlike other institutions which may offer English courses in other years as well). Students who opt for professional courses often come with a preconceived notion that they don't require to spend time and effort in acquiring language skills since they think that their domain expertise is sufficient to succeed professionally. The Orators' club provides a platform to change such notions and make them realize that language skills indeed enhance the scope of success in their personal and professional life.

Looking back at the achievements of the Orators' Club of MJCET, it becomes evident that those students who actively participated have benefited in more ways than one. They appear to be more confident and ready to take on responsibilities, they not only have improved communication skills but their involvement has also strengthened their resumes. Since they have different roles to play in organizing events like editing, public relations, logistics, technical support, preparing reports etc. the success of an event is an acknowledgement of their potential. The appreciation they have won from many quarters is fulfilling and motivates them to go forward.

The Orators' Club complements the learning received in the English theory and Lab. The Club provides a great deal of flexibility unlike a conventional classroom which has its own limitations of having to complete lessons in a specified time and order etc. Again, classroom teaching is usually assessed by a structured exam pattern. In an exam, a student could fail but in the Orators' Club activities there is no sense of failure – i.e. even if they have not won a prize for various events– still, by their very participation, they have gained a lot. It also provides life lessons to accept

with maturity that one cannot always win – winning and losing are a part of life.

Many of the events organized by the Orators' Club are judged not only by the teachers but by some senior students who are also part of the judging panel since students are seen to be open to peer-assessment as they can connect well with their peer group. When students themselves are involved in assessing a work with sincerity, they become very responsible and proactive. To encourage students' sense of responsibility, English teachers as facilitators can involve students too in the organizing events, evaluating performances and in various other aspects.

Care is taken to organize events at lean times when students are not burdened with exam pressure. It is interesting to note that with an investment of as little as a minute (in case of JAM and word games) students can gain greatly.

Students are highly benefitted through the Orators' Club as they get the necessary exposure to face the upcoming challenges of their professional life. The fear of public speaking gradually diminishes as they grow in confidence by participating in various activities, however brief they are. On the other hand, the timid, introverted kind of students, who prefer to be part of the audience, also gain a lot because they learn by observing those who are participating and gain courage to participate at a later date.

The activities planned and designed by the Orators' Club caters mainly to improve spoken activities such as public speaking, Just A Minute, group discussion, debate, storytelling, picture perception, Power Point Presentation, as well as develop writing skills through activities like essay writing, slogan writing etc. The club also acts as a catalyst to foster students' creativity through activities such as enacting skits, making poster presentations, collage, drawing, painting et. to name just a few. It is very interesting to note that the club with the influx of new, talented members, has branched into two new interest groups viz. poetry and photography club, both of which have brought out their work in print: *Next Text* - a book of poems by students with a poetic bent of mind and *MJCET - Our College in a Garden* which was a major

achievement of the Club in October, 2016. The latter, is a photo book that captures the beauty of the MJCET college campus and echoes the MJCET Vision Statement of being a part of the "Universal human quest for development and progress by contributing high caliber, ethical and socially responsible engineers who *meet the global challenge of building modern society in harmony with nature.*"

In addition to the above mentioned benefits, students also enhanced their self confidence, organizing skills, people skills, and ability to work in a team, problem solving skills, leadership skills, and experience an overall personality development. The authors, who were the faculty coordinators, motivated, encouraged and prepared students to participate in various literary events in other colleges as well as in the events organized by Osmania University.

One of the highlights of the Orators' Club was the preparation of a team to participate in the *The Hindu Eplus Challenge* in January -2012. More than 1,000 students from 32 colleges competed for the Hyderabad Regional Round of the Inter-Collegiate E-Plus Club Challenge. The MJCET Team won the third prize at this event and qualified to participate in the Final Round at Vishakapatnam where they won various individual prizes.

In the more recent past the club organized the first open literary fest held in Muffakham Jah College of Engineering and Technology –'**ORATORIA**' in August, 2015. The fest which was attended by a large number of students from colleges in the twin cities was a fun filled and enriching experience as students participated in literary events like dramatics, elocution, poetry recitation, news reporting and so on. This was followed by the event titled Grand Eloquence - A Literary Feast with the purpose of providing the engineering students an exposure to the wealth of English literature. Some of the items included were renderings from famous speeches, poetry and prose. It was on this occasion that amateur poets of MJCET were encouraged to come forward and read their own poetry which was very well received by the audience.

Although the college organizes campus recruitment training sessions by professionals for

senior students, the Orators' Club, over the years, has been organizing Mock Interviews consisting of three rounds: aptitude, technical and HR, for all students to familiarize them with various aspects of Interviews to make the students industry ready.

Like the other student bodies in the college, the Orators' Club members also participate in the Students Social Responsibility (SSR) programme during which they visit various schools, educate students about the need and importance of education in general and language skills in particular, in today's competitive world and conduct various activities such as extempore, quiz, origami workshop, individual counseling during interactive sessions. Another example of their sense of social responsibility is their attempt to create awareness of the need to **Go Green** through the event of the same name by organizing Poster Presentation in January, 2016 on this theme.

In order to keep the artists in us alive, Orators' Club MJCET organized the event '**Express Thyself**' in September, 2016. The uniqueness of this event was that the emphasis was not competing with each other to win prizes but rather to share their experiences and thoughts about what they were passionate about and since they were speaking from the heart; the presentations were very inspiring and had a great impact on the audience.

Orators' club has been instrumental in bringing about a positive impact on academic, mental and social aspects of those students who have been actively associated with it. In his book, *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*, Astin (1993) dealt with the impact of involvement in clubs and organizations on students. He stated that public speaking ability, leadership abilities, and interpersonal skills have significant correlations with the time spent participating in student clubs and organizations. Astin (1996) emphasized the importance of interaction with peer group and its favourable outcomes (p. 126). Cooper too observed that involvement in clubs and organizations has been shown to correlate positively with several areas of psychosocial development. According to him, members of student organizations score higher than non-members on such factors as educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle

planning, cultural participation, and academic autonomy (Cooper et al., 1994).

The authors, as mentors, with their involvement with the Orators' Club over the years have observed that the personalities of the students, who were actively involved in the club, evolved to be more self-confident, articulate and good team players. The learning that took place outside the classroom through the various extracurricular activities seemed to have equipped them with organizational and leadership skills, widened horizons and broadened outlook. Thus, having furnished them with soft skills and life skills, the orators' club has paved the way to make them industry-ready to face the challenges ahead.

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