

**One-Day National Workshop on
Career Opportunities through Communication Skills for
Visually Challenged Students**

**Organised by
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
In collaboration with**

DEPARTMENT OF EXTENSION AND CAREER GUIDANCE

BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY

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Education should be available to all in equal measure. There are discussions at the international level on providing unvarying education to everyone, irrespective of race, gender and social strata. The aftermath of the digital revolution and the enormous growth of Science and modern Technology have made the competitive world more challenging. Graduates have to fight with competence even to get into the job market. In such a social condition, the situation of the students and graduates with physical challenges has become more difficult. Beyond their psychological disturbances, caused by their physical disability, the exposure they get towards education and employability is far behind other students. But the highly known fact is that their IQ level and their learnability are in no way less than the normal students. However, only very few of such students get the opportunity to invest their ability into prosperous growth.

Understanding the social conditions and the need for providing the students with physical challenges a wider exposure on education and employability, with special reference to the need for communicative competence in the English language, the Department of English and Foreign Languages of Bharathiar University, in collaboration with the Department of Extension and Career Guidance, organised a Workshop exclusively for the Visually Challenged students at the tertiary level, with the title “Career Opportunities through Communication Skills for Visually Challenged Students”. It was conducted on 2nd September, 2017, in the Seminar Hall of the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University.

The Inaugural Ceremony of the Workshop commenced on Saturday, the 2nd of September, 2017, in the presence of the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Bharathiar University, Prof. Dr. A. Ganapathi, a renowned academician and scientist at the international level. Prof. Dr. A. Ganapathi was the Chief Patron of the event. There was very good response from the students despite the bad weather. The Department arranged transportation facility from the Central Bus Station, Coimbatore for the students. Volunteers from the Department of English and the Department of Career Guidance accompanied the participants, right from receiving them in the bus station, till sending them off in the bus station in the evening. Seventy enthusiastic visually challenged students participated in the workshop and they were highly responsive more than the organisers expected. Participants were welcomed in the traditional manner and were guided to their seats with the help of student volunteers.



Professor and Head of the Department of English, Dr. R. Saravana Selvan, the Convener and Organising Secretary of the workshop, offered a cordial welcome. He expressed his hearty greetings to all the participants. He noted, but he was very glad, that the number of students was highly unexpected. The workshop proved to be successful in the initial note itself, as the students were enthusiastic and energetic about attending the workshop. He also assured the participants that they would greatly benefit as the speakers were experienced academicians and corporate heads. The blend of academics and corporate exemplified the need for skill oriented education which would make the students eligible to compete in an open job market.

The theme of the workshop was introduced by Professor and Head of the Department of Extension and Career Guidance, Dr. A. Vimala, the Joint Organising Secretary of the Workshop. She elaborated on the reasons behind conducting a workshop exclusively for visually challenged students. She remarked that the objective was to spread awareness towards the career opportunities available for the disabled students as they tend to seclude

themselves from exploring and thus do not experience much growth. It is mandatory to ensure a holistic development in every sector of the society. Disabled people are equally capable of contributing to the national growth and it becomes a responsibility to aid their struggle for development. There are several opportunities available to them but they are not aware of what they are capable of. Thus, this workshop aimed at empowering their hopes towards a sustainable development, she asserted. When the job opportunities are explored by all candidates, language skills become an important element. English language has become highly skill-oriented, and knowledge in English is highly desired to excel in any field. Thus, the students were also motivated to improve their proficiency in the English language.



Prof. Dr. A. Ganapathi, the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Bharathiar University, then delivered the Inaugural Address, when he congratulated the Departments for their dedication toward excellence and social responsibility. He also proclaimed his appreciation for the theme of the workshop. He expressed his gratitude to the departments for conducting events of unique nature, with higher-order thinking, planning and execution. He also deliberated on why such initiatives are significant and the role of motivation in empowering challenged people. He stated that the workshop is one such platform where the students can discover their area of excellence and identify the job opportunities available to them.

The Keynote Address of the Inauguration was delivered by Ms. Reena Ravi, Head, CSR and Diversity Initiatives, Infosys, Bangalore, representing the Corporate Sector. She congratulated the departments and the University for taking the initiative in conducting a workshop exclusively for the Visually Challenged Students. During her session in the

workshop, which followed the Inaugural Ceremony, she delivered an inspiring speech with full interaction and energetic participation of the students. Her speech was highly motivating and self-regulating for the students as she made them understand their capabilities. The students were also highly responsive as it was a new experience where they could discover numerous career opportunities. The significance of the English language in a job-oriented market was also vividly illustrated by the speaker for the benefit of most of the participants who hailed from remote geographical areas that made them less competitive. She also talked about how students can make use of the available opportunities if we make them aware of the resources available. She motivated the students to have holistic growth in their academic work towards perfection.

The next session was handled by Prof. Dr. R. Vadivelu, former Professor of Regional Institute of English – South India (RIESI), Bangalore, a renowned academician and trainer, who discussed the importance of mastering the English language. It was moreover an interactive session where the participants were given introduction to the basic concepts of the English language and grammar and were made to formulate grammatically correct questions. The session was full of hands-on activities where the students participated enthusiastically with their responses in English. They were extremely energetic coming up with questions as the session provided them with an opportunity to polish their language skills.

The above session was followed by another session led by Dr. R. Saravana Selvan, an acclaimed academician and prominent trainer in language skills and soft skills. He handled the session with realistic examples and made the students understand that language is just a skill, which has to be practised to achieve perfection. He gave easy tips for the students to improve their communication skills in the English language, and these tips were highly welcomed by the participants because of the practical usefulness of such tips. After this session, a sumptuous lunch was provided to the participants. They were served by the students and faculty of the departments with utmost care and attention.



A brief session was held by the Department of Extension and Carrier Guidance, chaired by Prof. Dr. A. Vimala, in which the students were involved in brainstorming with reference to the career opportunities. After this session, the participants were introduced to *Jaws* and *NVDA*, the software platforms which are highly beneficial to the Visually Challenged Students. The next session was handled by Dr. P. Nagaraj, Assistant Professor of English. He conveyed his heartfelt gratitude to the Dignitaries and the participants from different places, as well as students of the Department of English and Foreign Languages and the Department of Extension and Career Guidance for their support to make the Workshop a great success. He discussed and gave examples of the different *Englishes* that are current in the contemporary world.

During the Valedictory function of the Workshop, a feedback session was held where the participants voluntarily came forward to share their experience. It was an emotional cum enlightening session, where even the organisers felt and expressed that such programmes should and would be conducted at least once in six months for the enlightenment of such students. The students shared their previous experiences in life where they were marginalized for their disability. But the workshop made them understand their capabilities and provided an opportunity to prove their worth. They were extremely happy about the way they were encouraged and promised to self-regulate their capabilities and increase their productivity. All the responses were highly positive and they also gave suggestions for future initiatives, focusing on their further needs. They asked for technology-based career development programmes which would enable them to access the world of technology.

The participants were also provided with a training kit which consisted of a bag, a book, and a CD with screen reading and typing software. The book discusses the significance of English language skills and effective methods of learning-teaching English. The CD contains two software **JAWS** and **NVDA** which would help the students in reading and typing. The Department of English has made all arrangements well in advance with the inputs from the Visually Challenged students, the present students as well as the alumni of the Department of English. We are proud to state that the Department has a tradition of admitting at least one Visually Challenged student for the Post Graduate programme in English. One of our Visually Challenged students, Ms. Sneha is placed in Tata Consulting Service, who was also a participant in the Workshop. We encourage such students at M.Phil. and Ph.D. Research levels too. Though the Department of English had the experience of providing the best care possible to such students, organising a gathering of such students for a training program was a challenging task. And yet all the staff and faculty met the challenge with all their effort.



On the whole, this event turned to be an eye-opener for the other Departments of the University, and the educational institutions around. The warm responses from the Visually Challenged Students and the support rendered by the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of the University and the faculty of the organising Departments made this a grand success. We do hope that there will be many more training opportunities to serve the Visually Challenged and take such initiatives to the macro level.

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