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COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE, EMPLOYABILITY AND HUMAN VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE SPEAK–SUCCEED–SERVE MODEL FOR HOLISTIC GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of higher education from knowledge transmission to capability development has created an urgent need to reconsider what constitutes a successful graduate. Academic qualifications alone are increasingly insufficient in environments where graduates are expected to communicate with clarity, collaborate across diverse contexts, adapt to technological change, exercise ethical judgement, and contribute meaningfully to society. Yet, higher education curricula often treat communication skills, employability competencies, and human values as parallel or isolated areas of development. This fragmented approach overlooks the interdependence through which these capabilities shape graduates' academic, professional, and social effectiveness. Against this background, the present paper introduces the Speak–Succeed–Serve (SSS) Model, an integrative conceptual framework that positions communication competence, employability, and human values as interconnected dimensions of holistic graduate development. The framework is developed through an integrative review of literature concerning communicative competence, employability, emotional intelligence, professional ethics, value education, digital and AI-enabled learning, contemporary workplace competencies, and the principles of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Relevant industry perspectives, pedagogical practices and illustrative institutional applications are also considered to strengthen the conceptual foundation of the model. On this basis, the proposed model conceptualises Speak as communication competence, Succeed as employability and professional capability, and Serve as ethical and socially responsible engagement. The framework further maps experiential learning, communication laboratories, role plays, simulations, reflective activities, mock interviews, MOOCs and responsible AI-assisted learning to these developmental dimensions. The paper contributes a unified conceptual structure for integrating communication education with employability preparation and value-based professional development. It also provides implications for curriculum design, teaching practice, institutional planning, industry engagement, and policy implementation under NEP 2020. The paper concludes that the proposed framework provides a basis for future empirical investigation rather than claiming empirical validation within the present study.

KEYWORDS: *Communication Competence; Graduate Employability; Human Values; Higher Education; Holistic Development; Professional Ethics; Artificial Intelligence in Education; NEP 2020.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education systems globally are undergoing a paradigm shift from disciplinary knowledge transmission toward holistic graduate development. While technical competence remains foundational, the emergence of globalisation, digital transformation, and knowledge-driven economies has elevated the importance of communication proficiency, interpersonal effectiveness, ethical responsibility, and adaptability. Employers identify communication skills as among the most critical determinants of employability, yet graduates frequently exhibit significant deficiencies in this domain. Figure 1 illustrates the sequential developmental pathway through which technical learning, communication competence, employability skills, and human values cumulatively converge to produce holistic graduate development.

English language education occupies a strategic position within this landscape. Beyond grammar and vocabulary, contemporary communication classrooms can cultivate professional confidence, leadership qualities, and value-based decision-making. Simultaneously, the proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), digital platforms, and online learning environments necessitates a re-examination of pedagogical approaches. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further reinforces this imperative by advocating multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and value-based holistic education. This paper investigates how communication education can function as a bridge between employability and human values, ultimately preparing graduates to speak effectively, succeed professionally, and serve society responsibly.

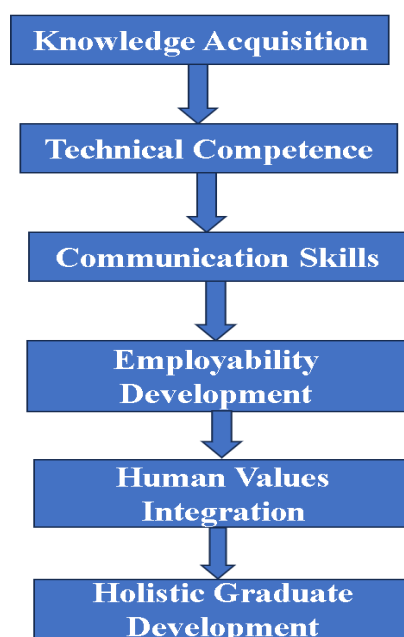


Figure 1: The Developmental Pathway from Knowledge Acquisition to Holistic Graduate Development

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Evolution of Communication Education

Communication has been central to intellectual traditions from classical rhetoric to Hymes's (1972) communicative competence framework, which established that language learners require not only grammatical knowledge but contextually appropriate usage. Canale and Swain (1980) expanded this to encompass discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic dimensions. Contemporary communication education now spans oral, written, interpersonal, intercultural, digital, and professional registers, with competence recognised as a fundamental graduate attribute.

2.2 Employability in the Twenty-First Century

Yorke (2006) defines employability as the combination of achievements, understandings, and attributes enabling graduates to secure and sustain meaningful careers. Harvey (2001) emphasises transferable skills—communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability—alongside technical expertise. The World Economic Forum (2025) identifies communication, collaboration, creativity, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking as paramount future-workforce competencies. Industry reports consistently reveal that graduates lack not technical knowledge but the communication competence to apply it effectively.

2.3 Human Values and Holistic Education

Philosophical traditions from Gandhi to Tagore affirm that true education nurtures body, mind, and spirit. Contemporary research confirms that value-based education—cultivating honesty, integrity, empathy, respect, and social responsibility—positively influences leadership development, conflict resolution, and organisational culture. Goleman's (1995, 1998) emotional intelligence construct links self-awareness, empathy, and social skills directly to professional effectiveness, reinforcing the argument that values are not supplementary but foundational to employability.

2.4 Research Gap and Contribution

Existing literature treats communication skills, employability, and human values as distinct domains. Limited scholarship examines their dynamic interrelationship or proposes an operational framework integrating them. The present study addresses this lacuna by developing the Speak–Succeed–Serve Model, demonstrating how communication functions as the connective mechanism through which professional competence and ethical responsibility are simultaneously developed.

Table 1: Literature Review Matrix

Author / Source	Focus Area	Key Finding	Identified Gap
Hymes (1972)	Communicative Competence	Language use is inherently contextual	Limited employability linkage
Canale & Swain (1980)	Communicative Competence	Strategic communication is essential	Values dimension absent
Yorke (2006)	Employability	Employability is multidimensional	Communication not central
Goleman (1995)	Emotional Intelligence	EQ predicts professional success	Limited classroom integration
WEF (2025)	Future of Work	Human skills outpace technical ones	Pedagogical models lacking
NEP 2020	Holistic Education	Skills and values must coexist	No operational framework

3. COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS A CATALYST FOR EMPLOYABILITY

Communication competence is not merely the exchange of information; it is the dynamic process through which professionals construct meaning, build relationships, influence decisions, and foster collaboration. Employers consistently report that graduates possess adequate domain knowledge but lack the communication competence required for workplace effectiveness, making verbal fluency, written precision, presentation ability, interpersonal effectiveness, and digital communication proficiency non-negotiable graduate attributes.

Verbal communication determines professional visibility in interviews, meetings, and negotiations. Written communication—emails, reports, and proposals—affects organisational efficiency directly. Presentation skills accelerate career progression by enabling graduates to showcase expertise and influence decisions. Interpersonal communication, encompassing active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution, underpins team productivity and workplace harmony. Digital communication extends these demands into email etiquette, virtual collaboration, and responsible social media use. Crucially,

communication skills constitute lifelong employability assets: as professionals advance into leadership, the capacity to inspire teams, communicate vision, and build trust becomes increasingly critical.

Table 2: Communication Competencies and Employability Outcomes

Communication Competency	Employability Outcome	Workplace Impact
Verbal Communication	Interview Success	Confidence and professional credibility
Written Communication	Professional Effectiveness	Clarity, accuracy, and efficiency
Presentation Skills	Leadership Development	Visibility and influence
Active Listening	Team Collaboration	Reduced conflict and better decisions
Interpersonal Communication	Workplace Harmony	Trust and relationship-building
Digital Communication	Technology Adaptability	Virtual and cross-platform effectiveness
Cross-Cultural Communication	Global Employability	Intercultural sensitivity
Conflict Resolution	Organisational Effectiveness	Sustainable team performance

4. HUMAN VALUES AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE



Figure 2: The Values-to-Excellence Pathway: From Human Values to Professional Excellence

Figure 2 traces how human values, mediated by emotional intelligence and ethical communication, translate into positive workplace relationships, effective leadership, and ultimately professional excellence. Recurring corporate ethical failures demonstrate that professional competence without

ethical grounding carries severe consequences for individuals, organisations, and society. Human values—honesty, integrity, empathy, respect, responsibility, cooperation, and compassion—shape organisational culture, employee relationships, customer trust, and institutional reputation. Research on emotional intelligence confirms that self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill significantly predict leadership effectiveness and career advancement. Digital transformation has expanded the ethical terrain to encompass data privacy, algorithmic bias, cyberbullying, and responsible AI use, making value education a contemporary and practical imperative rather than a peripheral moral concern.

Critically, human values function as employability multipliers: communication without empathy appears insensitive; leadership without integrity loses credibility; technical expertise without responsibility creates organisational risk. Integrating values into communication education creates graduates capable not only of securing employment but of contributing constructively to organisations and society—embodying the Speak, Succeed, and Serve vision.

Table 3: Human Values and Professional Outcomes

Human Value	Workplace Impact	Communication Dimension
Integrity	Trust and organisational credibility	Honest, transparent professional communication
Empathy	Stronger relationships and team cohesion	Active listening and respectful dialogue
Responsibility	Reliability and operational stability	Accountable and timely communication
Respect	Inclusive and psychologically safe culture	Non-discriminatory collaborative language
Cooperation	Innovation through collective intelligence	Consensus-building and shared problem-solving
Ethical Awareness	Responsible decision-making	Principled communication under dilemmas
Emotional Intelligence	Leadership and adaptability	Empathetic and regulated interpersonal exchange

5. EMPLOYABILITY CHALLENGES: A SKILL GAP ANALYSIS

Despite expanded access to higher education, a persistent gap separates academic preparation from workplace expectations. Overemphasis on examination-oriented learning, limited experiential opportunities, insufficient communication practice, and inadequate soft-skills integration contribute to this disparity. Engineering graduates often excel technically but struggle with presentations and group discussions; management graduates may lack persuasive communication and conflict management; arts and science graduates frequently report limited professional networking ability and digital communication competence. Across all disciplines, communication deficiencies remain among the most frequently cited reasons for graduate unemployment and underemployment.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution intensifies these demands: routine tasks are automated, elevating the premium on competencies that technology cannot replicate—creative problem-solving, ethical judgment, cross-cultural collaboration, and continuous learning. Holistic employability therefore integrates technical knowledge, communication skills, human values, emotional intelligence, digital literacy, and a lifelong learning orientation.

Table 4 : Employer Expectations vs. Graduate Preparedness

Competency	Employer Priority	Typical Graduate Level	Intervention Required
Communication Skills	Essential	Moderate to Low	Communication labs, mock interviews
Teamwork	Essential	Moderate	Collaborative projects, simulations

Problem-Solving	Essential	Moderate	Case-based and experiential learning
Leadership	High	Low	Role plays, student leadership programmes
Adaptability	Essential	Moderate	Real-world exposure and reflective practice
Ethical Responsibility	High	Moderate	Value-integrated communication activities
Emotional Intelligence	High	Low	Reflective writing, empathy-based discussions
Digital Literacy	High	Moderate to High	AI tools and MOOC engagement

6. INDUSTRY EXPECTATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

The World Economic Forum (2025), LinkedIn Skills Reports (2024), and NASSCOM (2024) consistently identify communication, adaptability, collaboration, and ethical responsibility as the most sought-after competencies across industries. AI can process information and generate content rapidly, but it cannot replicate human empathy, ethical reasoning, persuasion, or contextual judgement—making communication the critical differentiator in AI-augmented workplaces. Leadership in flatter, collaborative organisations depend increasingly on vision articulation, active listening, conflict resolution and ethical influence rather than hierarchical authority. Educational institutions must therefore cultivate lifelong learning mindsets and human-centred competencies rather than focusing exclusively on immediate employment outcomes.

Table 5: Top Skills for the Future Workplace (Synthesised from WEF 2025, LinkedIn 2024, NASSCOM 2024)

Skill Area	Industry Priority	Pedagogical Enabler
Communication Skills	Essential	Role plays, mock interviews, TED talks, JAM
Critical Thinking	Essential	Case studies, debates, problem-based learning
Adaptability	Essential	Simulations, cross-disciplinary projects
Emotional Intelligence	High	Reflective journals, empathy exercises
Digital Literacy	High	AI tools, MOOCs, virtual collaboration
Ethical Decision-Making	High	Ethical dilemma discussions, value mapping
Lifelong Learning	Essential	MOOCs, self-directed portfolios

7. NEP 2020, COMMUNICATION EDUCATION AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

The National Education Policy 2020 represents India's most ambitious higher education reform, reorienting the system toward holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, and learner-centred development. Its vision—producing intellectually competent, ethically aware, creatively capable, and socially responsible graduates—aligns precisely with the Speak–Succeed–Serve framework. The policy's promotion of interactive pedagogy, experiential learning, industry engagement, digital education, and value formation creates institutional space for communication education to become a true developmental platform rather than a linguistic exercise.

Implementation challenges remain—curriculum overload, faculty preparedness, assessment reform, infrastructure limitations, and industry collaboration gaps—but NEP 2020's provisions offer a mandate for the integrated communication approach this paper proposes.

Table 6 : NEP 2020 Provisions and Their Contribution to Holistic Development

NEP 2020 Focus Area	Contribution to Student Development	Communication Education Role
Multidisciplinary Education	Broader knowledge and adaptability	Cross-disciplinary communication tasks

Skill Development	Employability enhancement	Communication labs and placement training
Experiential Learning	Workplace readiness	Simulations, role plays, internships
Value-Based Education	Ethical citizenship	Reflective writing, ethical discussions
Digital Learning	Technological preparedness	AI tools, MOOCs, LMS integration
Critical Thinking	Problem-solving ability	Debates, case analyses, Socratic seminars
Lifelong Learning	Career sustainability	MOOC enrolment and self-directed practice

8. INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

English language classrooms can function as integrative platforms for communication, employability, and values development when populated with experiential, interactive, and reflective activities. The following practices have demonstrated particular effectiveness.

Table 7: Pedagogical Activity–Skill–Value Mapping

Pedagogical Activity	Communication Skill	Employability Competency	Human Value Fostered
Role Play	Speaking and Listening	Workplace Readiness	Empathy
Simulation	Professional Communication	Decision-Making	Responsibility
Drama-Based Learning	Fluency and Expression	Creativity	Cooperation
Group Discussion	Argumentation	Teamwork	Respect
Mock Interview	Interview Communication	Career Readiness	Confidence / Integrity
TED Talk Analysis	Listening and Presentation	Critical Thinking	Global Awareness
JAM Session	Spontaneous Speaking	Adaptability	Courage
Reflective Writing	Written Communication	Self-Assessment	Integrity
Gamification	Interactive Communication	Problem-Solving	Collaboration
AI-Assisted Practice	Digital Communication	Tech Adaptability	Self-Discipline
MOOCs	Academic Communication	Lifelong Learning	Self-Direction

Table 8 : Communication Lab Activities and Employability Outcomes

Lab Activity	Communication Skill Developed	Employability Outcome
Role Plays	Interpersonal Communication	Teamwork and Problem-Solving
JAM Sessions	Fluency and Confidence	Public Speaking and Leadership
TED Talk-Based Learning	Listening and Presentation	Critical Thinking and Communication
Simulations	Professional Communication	Decision-Making and Adaptability

Mock Interviews	Interview Communication	Career Readiness and Employability
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9. AI, MOOCs, AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

Artificial Intelligence and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have created unprecedented opportunities for accessible, personalised, and self-directed communication learning. AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and speech analysis applications provide immediate feedback on writing quality, pronunciation, grammar, and conversational fluency, enabling learners to practice independently and at scale. MOOCs via NPTEL, SWAYAM, Coursera, edX, and FutureLearn extend professional communication development beyond campus boundaries, support industry-relevant certification, and foster global learning community engagement. Crucially, these technologies are most effective when they supplement rather than supplant authentic human interaction: AI lacks the empathy, cultural sensitivity, and ethical judgement inherent in genuine communication. Value-based digital education—encompassing digital citizenship, responsible technology use, and information integrity—must therefore accompany technological proficiency.

Table 9: Digital Platforms, AI Tools, and Learning Outcomes

Platform/Technology	Primary Learning Outcome	Employability Benefit
ChatGPT	Conversational practice and writing support	Communication confidence and fluency
Grammarly	Professional writing development	Workplace writing competence
AI Speech Tools	Pronunciation and fluency	Oral communication for interviews
AI Interview Simulators	Interview performance	Placement readiness
NPTEL / SWAYAM	Professional skill development	Nationally recognised certification
Coursera / edX	Global academic and professional learning	Industry-aligned competencies
FutureLearn	Collaborative social learning	Lifelong learning habits
Virtual Meeting Platforms	Digital communication etiquette	Remote collaboration readiness
LMS (Moodle etc.)	Self-directed academic engagement	Autonomous learning orientation

10. CASE STUDIES: BEST PRACTICES IN INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

The following comparative case studies, synthesized from representative institutional practices, illustrate how communication education can simultaneously develop employability competencies and human values across diverse higher education contexts.

Table 10: Comparative Case Study Analysis

Case Study	Context	Key Interventions	Major Outcomes	Key Learning
1. Communication Laboratory (Engineering)	UG engineering students with strong technical but weak communication skills	Listening activities, role plays, group discussions, JAM sessions, mock interviews, peer evaluation	Improved speaking confidence, better presentations, reduced anxiety, greater placement readiness	Communication competence develops through repeated practice in supportive environments
2. Placement Communication Training	Recruiter-reported communication gaps in academically strong students	Resume writing, interview prep, group discussion practice, corporate communication, personality development	Increased interview confidence, professional communication, higher placement participation	Communication training is most effective when aligned to authentic career objectives
3. Values-Integrated	Institutions recognizing need	Ethical dilemma discussions,	Greater empathy and cooperation,	Human values are best developed

Communication	to balance competence with ethical awareness	community projects, reflective journals, value-centred role plays	enhanced social awareness, improved conflict resolution	through communication-centred experience, not isolated instruction
4. AI-Assisted Communication Learning	Students with access to AI writing and speech tools	AI writing practice, pronunciation training, interview simulation, presentation preparation	Increased self-directed learning, improved writing quality, greater flexibility	AI is most effective as a supportive partner; over-reliance on automation must be monitored

11. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK: THE SPEAK–SUCCEED–SERVE MODEL

Drawing on the literature, policy analysis, industry evidence, pedagogical practices, and case studies presented above, this study proposes the Speak–Succeed–Serve Model as an integrated framework for holistic graduate development. The model rests on three mutually reinforcing pillars: Speak (communication competence), Succeed (employability skills), and Serve (human values), converging toward Professional Excellence and Responsible Citizenship. Figure 3 presents the proposed Speak–Succeed–Serve Model, in which communication competence, employability skills, and ethical citizenship operate as interdependent pillars converging toward professional excellence and holistic graduate development.

Table 11: Components of the Speak–Succeed–Serve Framework

Pillar	Core Elements	Educational Outcome	Alignment
SPEAK	Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Presentation, Digital Communication	Communication Competence	Hymes 1972; Canale & Swain 1980
SUCCEED	Problem-Solving, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Leadership, Adaptability, Professional Readiness	Career Readiness	Yorke 2006; WEF 2025
SERVE	Integrity, Empathy, Responsibility, Respect, Social Commitment, Ethical Citizenship	Ethical Responsibility	Goleman 1995; NEP 2020
INTEGRATION	Holistic Pedagogical Practices, Technology, Reflection	Professional Excellence	Proposed Framework
FINAL OUTCOME	Lifelong Learning, Leadership, Social Contribution	Responsible Citizenship and National Development	NEP 2020 Vision

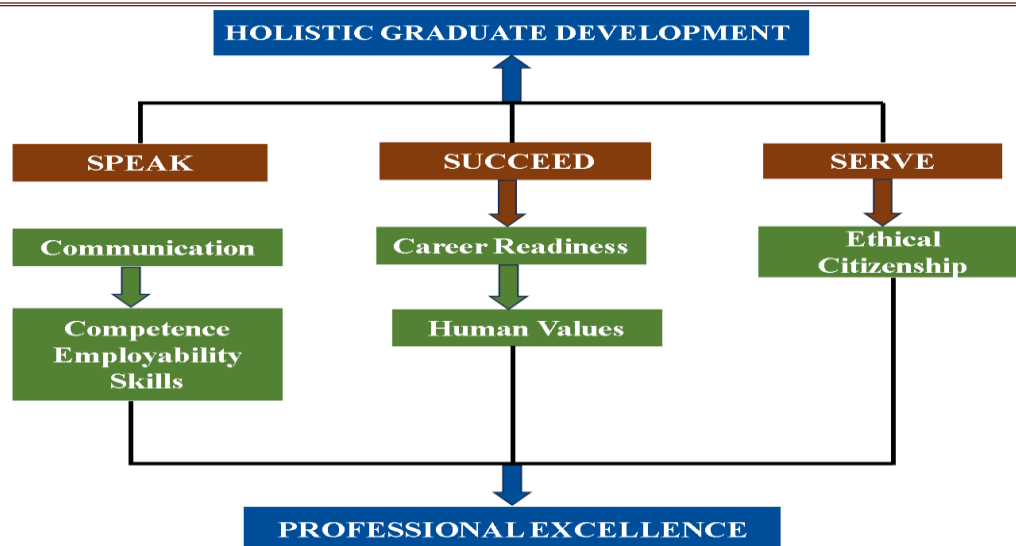


Figure 3: The Speak–Succeed–Serve Model of Holistic Graduate Development

The model's educational implications require institutions to integrate communication across disciplines, embed employability training throughout curricula, incorporate value-based experiential learning, utilise technology responsibly, and foster lifelong learning orientations. These actions align with NEP 2020 and global educational reform agendas.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Table 12: Stakeholder Recommendations

Stakeholder	Key Recommendations
Higher Education Institutions	Establish communication laboratories; integrate communication across disciplines; strengthen placement-oriented training; expand industry partnerships; incorporate value-based education modules
Faculty Members	Adopt learner-centred pedagogies (role plays, simulations, reflective tasks); integrate ethical discussions; utilise AI tools responsibly; provide continuous formative feedback
Students	Participate actively in communication activities; pursue MOOCs and professional certifications; build digital communication competence; cultivate emotional intelligence and ethical behavior
Policymakers	Support communication-centred curricula under NEP 2020; promote employability initiatives; strengthen industry–academia collaboration; facilitate digital learning infrastructure
Industry	Collaborate with institutions on curriculum design; provide internship and mentoring opportunities; support communication skill development programmes; promote ethical workplace cultures

The present study opens several avenues for empirical and comparative investigation. Longitudinal studies examining communication skill development and career progression would validate the model's long-term efficacy. Controlled studies on AI-assisted communication learning could establish optimal integration thresholds. Cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural comparisons would extend the framework's generalisability. Empirical validation of the Speak–Succeed–Serve Model across diverse institutional contexts, assessment frameworks for holistic employability, the relationship between digital citizenship and professional ethics, and communication competence as a predictor of entrepreneurial success represent further productive research directions.

14. CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that communication competence, employability skills, and human values are not independent educational objectives but mutually reinforcing pillars of holistic graduate development. Grounded in Hymes's communicative competence tradition, Yorke's employability construct, Goleman's emotional intelligence research and the transformative vision of NEP 2020, the Speak–Succeed–Serve Model offers a coherent framework for reimagining communication education in higher education. The evidence is unequivocal: graduates who communicate effectively, act ethically, collaborate meaningfully, and learn continuously are better equipped not only for career success but for leadership and responsible citizenship. As AI and automation reshape occupational landscapes, human-centred competencies become the decisive differentiators. Educational institutions that embrace this integrated vision will produce not merely employable graduates, but transformative professionals capable of serving humanity with integrity and compassion—individuals who genuinely Speak, Succeed, and Serve.

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Appendix A: Communication Skills Assessment Rubric

Criterion	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Average (3)	Needs Improvement (2)
Fluency	Speaks naturally with ease	Minor hesitation	Frequent pauses	Major hesitation throughout
Pronunciation	Consistently clear	Mostly clear	Generally understandable	Difficult to understand
Vocabulary	Rich and varied	Adequate and appropriate	Limited range	Very limited
Grammar	Highly accurate	Minor errors	Noticeable errors	Frequent errors impede meaning
Confidence	Highly confident	Confident	Moderate confidence	Low confidence evident

Appendix B: Mock Interview Evaluation Sheet

Parameter	Maximum Marks
Introduction and Self-Presentation	10
Subject / Domain Knowledge	20
Communication Skills (Verbal and Non-Verbal)	20
Confidence Level	15
Problem-Solving Ability	15
Professional Etiquette	10
Overall Impression	10
Total	100

Appendix C: Employability Skills and Human Values Assessment Frameworks

Skill Area	Observable Indicators	Assessment Method
Communication	Speaking clarity, writing quality, listening engagement	Rubric, peer review, portfolio
Teamwork	Collaboration, role contribution, conflict handling	Peer and self-assessment
Leadership	Initiative, delegation, motivational communication	Simulation observation
Problem-Solving	Analysis, creativity, decision rationale	Case study evaluation
Adaptability	Flexibility, learning speed, openness to feedback	Reflective journal
Digital Literacy	Tool proficiency, online etiquette, data responsibility	Task-based assessment
Human Values	Honesty, empathy, respect, ethical judgment	Checklist and reflective task