

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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

A SURVEY OF THE REASONS BEHIND A LARGE PERCENTAGE ENGINEERS REMAINING UNEMPLOYED

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ABSTRACT

On the threshold of major reforms, India is poised to become the third largest economy of the world by 2030. With the increasing focus of the government on manufacturing and infrastructure sectors through its "Make in India program", India is likely to become one of the most favored destinations for many foreign investors. This implies that there is likely to be a huge demand for engineers as manufacturing and infrastructure are closely associated with engineering. A number of surveys and studies, however, reveal a dearth of engineers with strong English language skills. Technically sound in their respective areas of specialization, these professionals fail to pass the test when it comes to putting across their ideas to others. This trend is worrying not only the industry but also the academia -both of which are trying their level best to instill language skills in these otherwise competent professionals. Despite a huge pool of engineering professionals that pass out every year from engineering colleges, the industry still feels that it needs workforce better equipped with language skills. In order to address this long-standing issue, a program with a clear focus on the improvement of the language abilities of these professionals is required. It is this very area that this research paper proposes to address.

Key words : English language skills, engineering, improvement in language skills

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INTRODUCTION

The engineering professional of today is required to possess not only technical knowledge but also a skill set that allows him perform more productively in the work environment. A number of studies reveal that a sufficiently large percentage of engineers from the best of the institutes possess communication skills ranging from average to below average. With India likely to become a destination for investment in its manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, there is going to be a demand for professionals who will be expected to create

engineering marvels. Global corporations earlier engaged engineering firms to do only testing and other back-end jobs; with the launch of the "Make in India" initiative, however, the engineering professional is going to be center-stage involved in work of more productive nature- work that involves cutting edge research, innovation and application. Being in the transitional stage, Indian engineering sector is going to be one of the most exciting and lucrative industries to work in times to come.

To be able add value to the entire system, the engineers will have to acquire skills and

abilities that go beyond their immediate areas of specialization; given the global nature of the jobs, an ability to write and speak well in English is likely to be most in demand. Spoken by almost 360 to 400 Million people as their first language, English is the most widely spoken language in the world. A sound knowledge of the same is, therefore, a must for exchange of experience, knowledge, technical know-how and ideas. A number reports released from time to time, however show that a large percentage of engineers are not able to fully utilize their knowledge and potential on account of inadequate language skills. The difference in the salary packages of the proficient and the not-so-proficient is also huge. If the Indian economy, as a whole, is to benefit from this new opportunity, then the Indian engineer will have to be more articulate.

The industry –academia gap in this area that is widening by the day must be bridged before it is too late. Achievement of this goal, however, lies in getting to the root of the problem and addressing it.

The paper has been written using both primary and secondary research data. A set of engineers working in a reputed automobile company at various levels beginning from entry to middle and senior management levels were administered questionnaires designed to elicit information on how adequate or inadequate language skills affected their professional growth, whom they held responsible for the same and what efforts they were making to improve upon their language ability. The responses were then analyzed and a conclusion arrived at. Views of language professors of an engineering college and HR professionals were also recorded in a similar fashion.

The research on the secondary level involved gathering evidence with regard to the subject in hand through published surveys and studies by “Aspiring Minds” an employability and evaluation and Certification Company published in various newspapers from time to time. These studies gave a useful insight into the magnitude of the problem and how adversely it was affecting the engineering graduates.

Both methods reveal scanty attention being paid to language training in the formative years of the students. Students from the vernacular mediums take their engineering entrance tests in their mother tongue itself. These students then find it difficult to comprehend the lectures delivered in the class in English language. In the absence of a suitable corrective action at the initial stages of learning, the problem aggravates and makes itself manifest at several levels later. Keeping the source of problem in view, are we, then, justified in holding engineering colleges alone responsible for low levels of competence in language skills? Going by the above discussion, it is clear that there are other stakeholders contributing to the deterioration of language abilities. The paper in question will look at the causes of the problem and also propose a solution to it.

Context: The language ability of a professional has a lot of bearing on his professional growth. Regardless of how well equipped he is with technical skills, if he does not possess the ability to convey his ideas adequately to the others, his growth is likely to be restricted. The data collected through primary and secondary research reveals that engineering professionals themselves feel the heat when after working for years somebody with better communication skills is given a promotion. Surveys of various engineering colleges undertaken by employability evaluation companies have demonstrated that only about 2.9% can speak fluent English. If these engineers are to take up leadership positions on a global level and also make the best use of the knowledge and experience of the others spread over the world, they will have to make a conscious effort to improve their verbal skills.

Motivation: The newspaper surveys and an interaction with HR personnel, language professors and engineering students demonstrates that the engineering students are unable to land good jobs on account of poor language abilities. Even if, however, they do manage to grab a good opportunity, it becomes difficult for them to cope with responsibilities of a higher on account of poor language skills. Finding a solution to this all pervasive problem, therefore, became the focus of this paper.

Literature review

“Indian Engineers unemployable owing to inadequate language skills”

An article published in ET Bureau Aug 7 ,2015 titled “How English –speaking skills are keeping Indian engineers away from their dream jobs” mentions that while 97 per cent engineers in the country cannot speak English required for high-end jobs in corporate sales and business consulting , 67 per cent graduating from colleges in India do not possess spoken English skills required for any job in knowledge economy.(Aspiring Minds)

Another study called “The National Spoken English Skills of Engineers Report”, conducted by Aspiring Minds , an employability evaluation and certification company headquartered in Gurgaon ,mentions that though the language problem is all pervasive, it is far more pronounced in tier 2 and tier 3 colleges. This result was obtained after surveying almost 30,000 engineers across 500 engineering colleges. The report also mentions that differences in the language abilities amongst students are because of diverse backgrounds, regional differences and vernacular mediums. It becomes a challenge for the colleges to instill language skills in people from such diverse backgrounds. According to UB Desai , Director of IIT Hyderabad , the inability to communicate well in English is not restricted to IITs but is prevalent across the country and even in China and a few European nations. He further added that this deficiency leads to students losing opportunities as some companies come to the campus for global placements.

The study further adds that students from the metros do much better in spoken English skills as compared to their peers in non-metros. While affirming this fact , Kushal Sen, dean — faculty at IIT Delhi, says that most of their students do not face a problem with spoken English but about 30% do require training in soft skills. Varun Aggarwal , co-founder and chief technology officer, Aspiring Minds observes that Tier-1 colleges fare better in spoken English skills than their peers down the line and the spoken English ability of candidates becomes worse, on average, in campuses in lower-tier cities. He mentions that the better the spoken English skills, the higher is the salary package. This group manages

to draw 30-50 percent higher salary as compared to similarly qualified candidates without English skills. IIT Madras's dean (planning) R David Koilpillai is of the view that proficiency in English language gives a boost to the confidence. A number of bridge courses, orientations and workshops are organized by the college to help the people from diverse backgrounds overcome the barrier. The problem areas identified are pronunciation, fluency followed by grammar. The report concludes that, at present, only 6% of the engineers show the ability to speak or respond spontaneously.

On August 8’2015 ,Hindustan Times carried results of another survey conducted by the same employability evaluation and certification company. Titled” 97% of the engineering graduates cannot speak English fluently” the report stressed that language skills are indispensable for corporate sales or business consulting. 51% of the engineers are not employable based on their spoken English scores and of the 6 lakh engineers that graduate annually, only 2.9% candidates are fluent while speaking English. The findings were an outcome of a test administered to 30,000 students across 500 colleges in the country.

Academicians agree that not being fluent in English has posed a hurdle to many during recruitment. “Since the basis of the admission in engineering colleges is limited to maths and science, English skills which are missing right from school are not tested nor honed,” said GT Thampi, principal, Thadomal Sahani Engineering College (TSEC), Bandra.

On 24th of Jan, 2016 Aspiring minds again insisted through a study that the problem continues to persist as 80% of the engineering graduates are found to be unemployable. This time the report was based on a survey of 1,50,000 engineering students who graduated in 2015 from over 650 colleges.

Objective : A survey of the major reasons behind a large percentage of engineers remaining unemployed.

Research problem: The focus of the research into the subject, hitherto, has been expressing in quantitative terms the engineers remaining unemployed after acquiring the desired qualifications. The surveys beginning from the year

2012 going up to 2016 reveal that despite all the data related to the numbers ,we have not been able to find a solution to this long-standing problem .The proposed study aims to address this issue by suggesting a few tested methods for resolving this crisis.

Research technique used

To find a solution to the above stated problem the researcher surveyed the newspapers and internet to gather quantitative information about the unemployable engineer . The data on how seriously language problem affected a person's career was gathered through questionnaires carrying subjective type questions. Separate questionnaires were designed for engineers (working professionals), HR professionals, and English language professors.

While the engineering professionals and language professors and were administered questionnaires with open- ended and closed questions , the HR professionals were given a combination of MCQ's and ,closed open ended questions .

A close scrutiny of the answers given by the engineers (working professionals only) revealed that they did attach a lot of importance language skills especially when required to give presentations or engage in negotiations. The language ability also played a role in their further growth in the company because at higher levels they were required to deal with more complex issues involving overseas clients. Besides, effective communication ability also helped in dealing in better supervision of teams.

Most of the engineers who were questioned said that the best way to instill better language skills was to impart quality training at the school level itself. They felt that if the medium of instruction in every school was English , the problem of communication would be lessened to a great extent. A few others attributed the language problem to atmosphere at home, surroundings and peer group.

Similar sentiments were echoed by the HR professionals who felt that since the engineers were, by and large, being hired for technical jobs there was really no need for them to have excellent communication skills but this ability acquired great

importance when it came to handling senior management and leadership positions. Language professors were of the opinion that students coming from diverse backgrounds were a challenge to handle. Engineering students from vernacular mediums had the maximum problem comprehending and learning English because the priority in college was their core subjects and not English. All the stakeholders were, however, unanimous that the medium of instruction in the school played a big role in learning the language. A student entering college must have basic English language skills which could be further polished in college.

Findings

A close examinations of the responses given by all the concerned groups reveals that there is a need to bring about a definite change in the primary and high school curriculum . The students must inculcate the habit of reading books right from the beginning so that they can learn a variety of structures and a wide range of vocabulary that is required to express complex thoughts. At the college level the communication ability should be polished by way of presentations and group discussions. Language is a skills that can be acquired by way of practice and over a period of time and to achieve as much one must have a fine reading habit.

Conclusion

The survey, all in all, throws light on the fact that language abilities do play a crucial role in one's career and an assessment of one's personality is normally made through his communication skills. For handling senior management positions, it is required that one possess both language and convincing abilities.

Recommendations

Availability of online language listening ability tests similar to the ones given in the IELTS and TOEFL exams can be of great help in improving the comprehension levels of the working professionals, especially the ones dealing with English speaking clients. For spoken part of the language one must strive for fluency by sticking to English as the language of communication, atleast , at the work place. A conscious effort in this direction can most definitely make a difference. Vocabulary and

grammatical accuracy can be achieved through a study of sentence correction and completion exercises designed by recognized English language experts. Owl.purdue is one such resource that one must exploit if one wishes to understand the logic behind usage of various grammatical structures.

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