

COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH STEERS TO EMPLOYMENT: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: In this highly competitive global environment, proficiency in English is considered as one of the core employability; engineering students need to increase their English communication skills and soft skills in order to cope with the increasingly tough competition in the job market. Mere subject knowledge in the chosen field of engineering is not going to be a guarantee for a professional graduate to get a good job or excel at the workplace. Major information technology (IT) companies and ITeS companies in India recruit engineering graduates, who have good English language communication skills. In other words, English language skills are considered life skills in the modern world. The main objective of this paper is to gather information about the unemployed professional students with low proficiency in communication skills in one hand. And, in the other hand, to identify suitable strategies needed by the unemployed professional students, who lack effective communication skills in English Language.

Keywords: Communication skills, Information technology, English language, Soft skills, Integration and proficiency.

Introduction: Communication is the soul of every business, be it local or global. Communication constantly involves flow of information across different channels in any organization and also timely feedback. Communication is the most crucial aspect that binds every person in this Universe. Human beings express verbally and non-verbally through words, appearance, eyes, body face, posture etc. The performance and interaction of human beings is entirely dependent upon communication. Communication is the most essential identification to triumph in the life of a graduate engineer not only at the entry level but also at subsequent stages of development of one's career. The stepladder of success, in any business, cannot be climbed without possessing the mandatory command over English language proficiency.

India is one of the emerging economies, which has been exploiting its competitive global advantage to survive in the Global IT market. The Indian IT/ITeS Companies have started securing overseas contracts worth billions of dollars by engaging local persons. Since the main businesses are located in USA, Europe etc. and the back end operations of these IT/ITeS Companies are performed on Indian soil, there has emerged a need to create a class of Graduates, who are fluent in their English language communication skills.

According to a National Association for Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) IT-BPO Status Report 2009, "the industry gainfully provides direct employment to 2.23 million people and is creating indirect jobs for about 8 million people...." Indian BPO industry is on a fast track growth providing services to nearly all the Fortune 500 companies and many others, covering every conceivable sector that can be outsourced. The major players being Genpact,

WNS Global Services, Wipro BPO, HCL BPO, ICICI OneSource, IBM Daksh, Infosys BPO to name a few (Lesikar, Flatley, Rentz&Pande 2009). Research has clearly shown that there is a positive link between effective communication skills and better employability in the IT Sector.

In accordance with the Aspiring Minds' National Employability Report for Engineering graduates, 2013, 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% lack analytical and quantitative skills.

Industry sources indicate that only 25% of the fresh engineering graduates are employable in BPO and ITES industries. The present curriculum in schools and colleges is focused on written English rather than spoken English. Students are also not given opportunities to speak often in the class. They also feel that the academic system is not market responsive and that the academic community is also not aware of the right skills needed to succeed in BPO industry.

Interviews -Role of Communication:

Interview is one of the main means of securing an entry into any company. Be it the entry level, middle management or top management position, interview plays the most significant role, in as much as, one's scholastic achievements, experience and usefulness to the organization etc. can be explained orally during the course of an interview. In Sectors like IT/ITeS, three kinds of Interview are in vogue in India. They are Personal Interview, Subject/Technical Interview and Group Discussion. In all these interviews, essentially, a person's suitability to the job is thoroughly tested. It is, in this context, the role of Communication Skills which plays a vital role.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is an attempt to find a way out to the problem that hinders the unemployed professional students with ineffective communication skills in English from gainful employability. It is an attempt to believe that they can use effective communication skills in English, which will lead them to gainful employability.

Problem of the study: The twin hypotheses proposed to be tested are Effective English language communication skills will lead to gainful employment of professional students. In-effective English language communication skills will result in professional students not securing jobs with good compensation package.

Research questions:

- Can effective communication skills in English language of unemployed professional students result in gainful employability?
- Why do unemployed professional students with ineffective Communication skills in English language secure jobs with low compensation packages?

Objectives of the study: The main objective of the study is to gather information about the unemployed Professional students with low proficiency in communication skills. To identify suitable strategies needed by the unemployed professional students, who lack effective communication skills in English language? To enable the students to use the target language with confidence and to improve the attitude of the unemployed professional students towards.

Research Method: A field study method shall be chosen to observe and understand the role of effective communication skills in helping unemployed professional students, in finding gainful employability that is to find jobs with a decent compensation package. The researcher shall undertake the following research methodology: Quantitative and Qualitative methods involving a field observation study (questionnaire) and interviews, wherein an attempt will be made by the researcher to determine the cause and effect relationship among the variables under study.

Tools and Technique: A questionnaire and interview schedule for not only the unemployed professional students who are studying in the Engineering Colleges situated in and around Hyderabad City, but also the working Professional Executives in IT/ITeS companies located in Hyderabad, shall be designed to cover the two areas of the researchers hypotheses, in order to find out, to what extent these factors affect unemployed professional students. It is also proposed to conduct interviews with the various Engineering Colleges under the Study and also the Officers of various

IT/ITeS companies which have been chosen for the purpose of the Study.

Collection of the Data: This study follows a multi-method approach achieved through triangulation in collecting the data so as to enhance validity and reliability. This triangulation is achieved by using semi-structured classroom observation checklist, open-ended interview and structured questionnaire.

Questionnaire for Engineering Students:

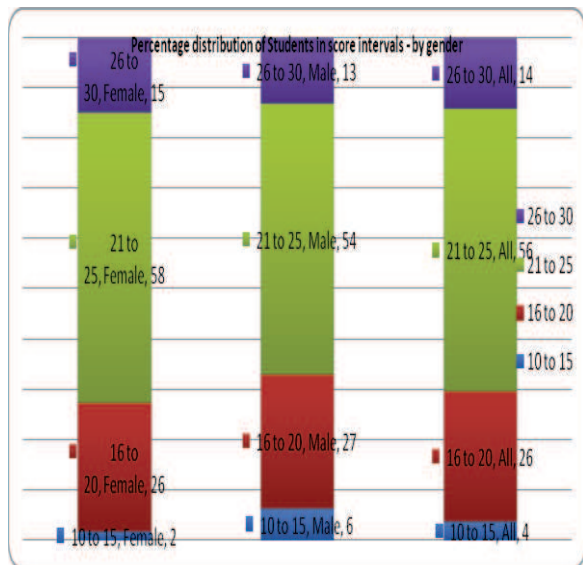
Back Ground Information: This section was designed to collect background information such as the Name of the Student, name of the Engineering College and personal information like the Age, Gender(Male/Female), Medium of Study at SSC/10th Class and also at Plus 2/Intermediate level in terms of Telugu/English/Hindi languages. This has been essentially incorporated considering the fact that a large number of Students would have studied in the Telugu medium and it is essential to elicit this information for a proper understanding of their English Language Communication skills. In addition, it has also been incorporated to understand the attitude towards learning English Language, as it has a lot to do with one's learning temperament. Another important aspect, which has been included, is the ability of the Parents to be able to talk in English language.

Aim of the Questionnaire: In this section, the aim of the Survey(Data Collection through the Questionnaire) has been clearly explained that it is to understand the positive correlation between effective English language communication skills among Engineering Graduates and their enhanced employability in IT (Information Technology)/ ITeS (Information Technology Enabled Services) Sector companies.

It is proposed to discuss the Scope of the Research Work the prevalent academic environment with special reference to Engineering colleges and the changing scenario of IT/ITeS Sector with particular focus on the recruitment of Graduate Engineers with effective English Language communication skills, the role and importance of Communication in general (Society, Business) and the role and importance of English Language Communication skills in the context of the employability of Graduate Engineers passing out of Engineering colleges located in and around Hyderabad.

The problem is, more so, in the context of Telangana, due to the existence of a large no of Engineering Colleges and correspondingly, huge turnout of Graduate Engineers, whose employability has become a challenge mainly due to lack of effective English language communication skills, which the IT/ITeS Industry are keenly looking for. If only 20% of Engineering Graduates are employable, 70% are becoming unemployable. IT/ITeS companies prefer

only fresh recruits. Therefore, the researchers have chosen this topic, which focuses on the core competency which the IT/ITeS Industry is looking for among the fresh Engineering Graduates. Distribution is observed for the individual Male/Female groups.



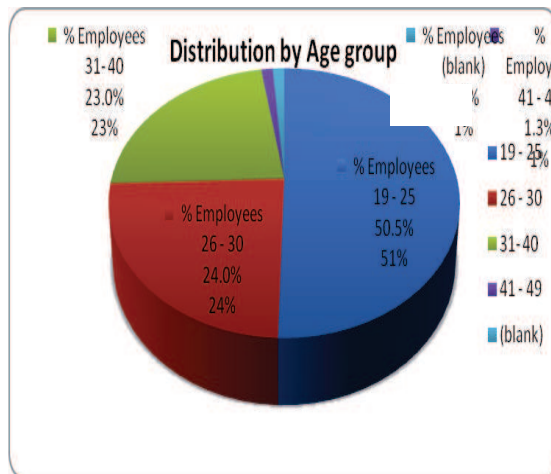
Percentage distribution of Students in score intervals - by gender

58% of female students and 54% male students have scored between 21 to 25 marks. Overall average scores for both male and female stands at 56%. 26% female students and 27% male students have scored between 16 to 20 marks. Overall average scores for both male and female stands at 26%. 2% female students and 6% of male students have scored marks between 10 to 15. Overall average scores for both male and female stands at 4%. 15% female students and 13% male students have scored marks between 26 and 30. Overall average scores for both male and female stands at 14%.

The questions in the Questionnaire have been generally designed to test the Speaking skills, Listening skills and Non-verbal communication skills of Students studying in the Engineering Colleges and the working professionals in the IT/ITeS Companies. The number of questions is 30, and similar set of questions, have been given to both the Engineering Students and the working professionals to facilitate uniformity and to achieve reliability and validity.

Out of 30 questions, 13 questions have been framed on Listening, 10 questions on Speaking and 7 questions on Non verbal communication. For the purpose of this research, the following score range has been proposed:

- 26 – 30 : Excellent
- 21 – 25 : Very Good
- 16 – 20 : Good
- 10 – 15 : Average

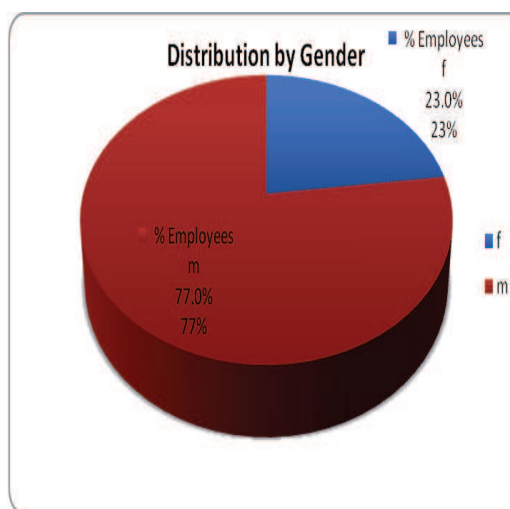


Age Demographics (Age in years)

Analysis of Data on Working Professionals 50.5% working professionals are in the age group of 19 to 25. 24.0% working professionals are in the age group of 26 to 30. 23.0% working professionals are in the age group of 31 to 40. 1.3% working professionals are in the age group of 41 to 49.

This figure particularly indicates that a substantial majority of the working professionals are very young and have taken up their jobs immediately after completion of their Engineering Graduation. They are in the age group of 19 to 25.

Nearly 47% of the working professionals are in the age group of 26 to 40, which means they have already gained some experience in their profession. A minuscule percentage of 1.3 working professionals are in the age group of 41 to 49.

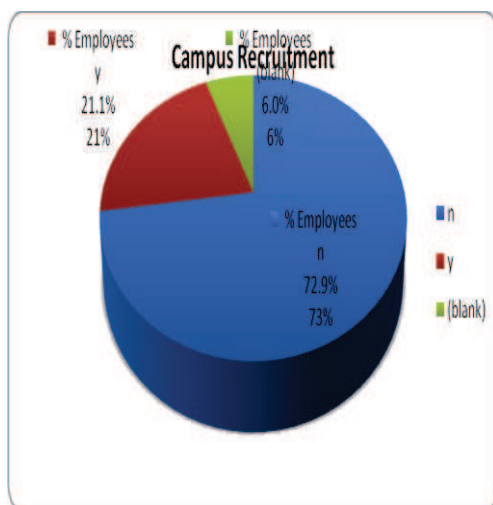


Sex Demographics (Sex) f= Female; m= Male 23% of working professionals are females. 77% of working professionals are males.

This figure reveals succinctly that a considerable majority of working professionals are males. This also goes to show that these IT/ITeS companies have also

a preference for Male employees (unwritten rule), mainly because of the working hours, in which these companies have to engage. Most of the IT/ITeS companies have American and European Clients. The time zones of these countries and the time zone of India do not exactly match and therefore, the Indian IT/ITeS Companies are required to work during night time between 8 pm to 8 am, during which time, male employees are preferred for various reasons including Security.

The lesser percentage of female working professionals is also partly attributed to the percentage of women preferring to take up IT/ITeS jobs.



Recruitment through Campus (n= No; y= Yes)

72.9% of working professionals were not recruited through the Campus of their Engineering Colleges/Academic Institutions. 21.1% of working professionals were recruited through the Campus of their Engineering Colleges/Academic Institutions. This figure reveals clearly the trends in terms of recruitment of Graduates from the campuses of the Engineering Colleges/other Academic institutions. This figure has thrown up an interesting statistic about the percentage of recruitment from the Campuses. Only 21.1% of the working professionals were recruited through the Campus of their Engineering Colleges/Academic Institutions. 72.9% of working professionals were not recruited through the Campus of their Engineering Colleges/Academic Institutions.

This clearly shows the following trends: IT/ITeS Companies due to their operational requirements require a particular Set of Competencies. Although most of these companies require, more or less, similar set of competencies, yet, these requirements vary from Company to Company, mainly because of the differential location of the Clients of these IT Companies.

IT/ITeS companies normally subject the Engineering Students, during their 3rd year of Study, to a series of

Tests, which seek to test the Core Competencies required by them. The most important core competency required by them is the Effective English Language Communication Skill, suiting to their Client.

Low percentage of recruitment from the Campuses indicates that these IT/ITeS companies are not able to source all their requirements from the Campuses. Moreover, scores of companies try to select the best Students from these academic institutions.

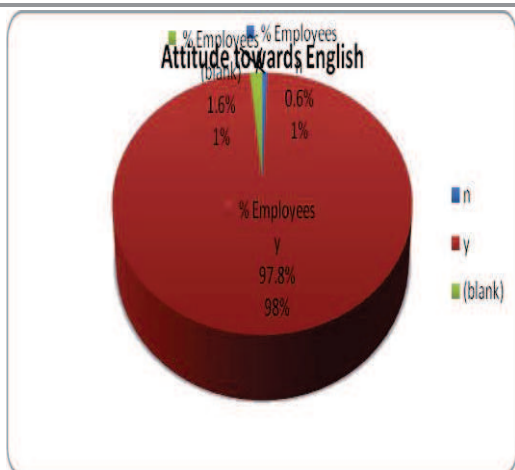
Moreover, certain Employment Portals and a host of other HR agencies have also engaged themselves in inspection for the right talent for the IT/ITeS companies. These employment portals, generally, focus their attention on sources other than the Campuses of Engineering Colleges.

Low percentage of campus recruitment from the academic institutions also is attributed to the filling of the Skill Gap by them. While the IT/ITeS companies look for a particular Skill Set, the Academic institutions are still cover behind in quite meeting their requirements. This gap needs to be bridged.

Once the Graduates leave the Academic Institution and they are not recruited through the Campus, due to any reason, they are virtually, out of Campus recruitment, for Life. Even if they improve their individual Skill set of competencies, they are not in a position to go through the Campus recruitment process; rather, they virtually missed the bus. They have, therefore, to necessarily, depend upon the HR Agencies/Employment or Job Portals in operation in the public domain. Individual IT/ITeS companies issue advertisements on their own in the Print/Electronic media to source talented persons from Pan India, to meet their specific requirements.

IT/ITeS companies also prefer persons with at least one or two years experience and therefore, such persons with experience are not found in the Campuses of Educational Institutions. If the reduced intake by top IT, IT-enabled services from campuses is any indication in the last few years, one can say that large-scale induction looks a thing of the past. This is resulting in a newer trend – take freshers off campus. Reduced bench sizes (the workforce kept as reserve) and increased utilization rates are a manifestation of the reduced intake of fresher's. Majority on the bench are fresher's, waiting for their turn to go on a project.

Another reason for software services companies hiring fewer people is that attrition levels have narrow wed to 14% in FY13 from 19% in FY11. The number of employees quitting their first jobs is also at a record low.



Attitude towards Learning English Language (n= No; y= Yes)

97.8% working professionals of the selected companies have positive attitude towards learning English language communication skills. 0.6% working professionals only have indicated a negative attitude towards learning English Language communication skills. This figure clearly points out the Positive preference/attitude the working professionals have entertained during their educational career. The foundation for any effective English Language Communication Skill can be laid much before a Person takes up a Job in IT/ITeS Sector.

One of the options before them was to study in the English Medium of Instruction at the Graduation level. In some other cases, even if the Persons have studied in the Telugu/Hindi medium of instruction, they had to upgrade their English Language communication skills in keeping with the requirements of the IT Industry.

Excellent proficiency in English language not only helps them master the Soft skills but also helps them to score well in their Graduation examination.

Integration of Indian economy with that of the emerging Global Business Environment has necessitated a need for the creation of a Class of Persons, who sitting in India are able to attend to the needs of Clients, located in United States of America and countries in Europe. It is a fact that during the last 20 years or so, the IT/ITeS Sector has gradually and consistently grown. The growth of IT/ITeS Sector in India is not at all possible, in case the attitude of our young professionals was not positive towards the English language communication skills.

The working environment of any IT company is very conducive, healthy, sophisticated and technology

driven. Some of the IT/ITeS companies are also allowing its employees to even work from Home (Google allows its employees) and therefore, such positive inducements also encourage people to prefer IT Industry.

Educational Institutions, State Governments and Parents have begun to realize the importance of English Language communication skills and accordingly, encourage students to master this language. Thus, in this case study, nearly 97.8% have indicated their Positive Attitude towards the English Language.

If a comparison is made with the information above figure 4.34 and 4.35, none of working professionals has scored marks between 10 to 15, which means they have excellent proficiency in terms of English language communication skills and a substantial majority have excellent command over the English language communication skills.

Observations: The engineering students are generally a mix where some have studied in Telugu medium of instruction in their Secondary education and a large majority has studied in English medium of instruction. When there is a mix of students who pursued their SSC and Plus 2 in Telugu medium of instruction and English Medium of instruction, communication skills syllabus remains the same for both categories. One of the main reasons for lack of confidence during personal interview, as per the faculty members is lack of skills considered essential for personality development. Since the students from the Telugu medium and the English medium are clubbed in Engineering, it is positively influencing students' learning abilities. There appears to be a strong need to allow optional classes for the students who studied in Telugu medium of instruction, in order to equip them with necessary soft skills and communication skills.

Campus recruitment in engineering colleges takes place normally in the 3rd year and 4th year. However, as has been observed, communication skills are imparted even in the 1st year of engineering itself. It seems to be a good practice which is result oriented. The biggest complaint of IT industry is inadequate communication skills required of the fresher graduates. Due to rapidly increasing of engineering institutions and also due to lack of qualified faculty, the fresh engineering graduates suffer from inadequate English language communication skills, inadequate written communication skills and proper representation techniques.

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