



Employ(ability), ESP and Psychological Well-being at the Crossroads

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Abstract

This study investigates the intersection of employability demands, English communication skill development, and their psychological impact on learners within management and technical education in India. Drawing on government, industry, and academic reports, it highlights persistent issues such as skill mismatches, communication silos, and mental blocks in English learning—factors that hinder alignment with job market expectations. The paper argues that these challenges are interlinked and must be understood within larger socio-political and institutional contexts. Through student reflections and teacher experiences, the study reveals overlooked gaps in the teaching-learning process and the competing agendas among stakeholders. It emphasizes the need to address not only skill development but also learner well-being and systemic limitations. The insights offered aim to inform educators, policymakers, industry leaders, and researchers in shaping future strategies for workforce readiness, teacher development, and inclusive educational reform.

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1. Introduction

This paper is part of a larger inquiry into the understanding of the factors that act as stumbling blocks in the learning of English communication skills of management and technical graduates in India. The various national and international employability reports and surveys mention 'skills mismatch', 'gaps', and the inabilities of management and/or technical education graduates to meet the industry standards of communication proficiency expectations.

In a globalised era where generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is predominating human minds, brains and inmost households, the construct 'employability' is a prominent discourse and inefficacy in practical English communication skills/'Soft skills'/'Non-technical skills' have been identified as one of the pivotal factors to be employable or a 'skills deficit/skills mismatch' (Digital Learning, India, April 2018) in existing employment.

Recently (March 2025), Dr M. Jagadesh Kumar, former Chairperson of the University Grants Commission (UGC), while addressing young graduates on global hiring trends, specifically emphasised the importance of strong communication skills ('ability to speak clearly', 'ability to write concisely'), soft skills, adaptability, and teamwork alongside interdisciplinary knowledge.

To begin with, the English language in India has a history, to date, of intense debates – in leveraging its status, the age or class at which it is introduced, sentiments, and controversies of foreign origin and influence, and so on. Having originated from the needs of the British government's administration, English in India, at present, is an 'associate official language' as stated in Article 343 of the Constitution of India. Globally, it is regarded as a link language ('Lingua Franca') in the spheres of work, business, technology, and internet content, and as an official language of many international organisations.

Its colonial linkage is undeniable, but, apace with the contemporary and/or postcolonial period, its access, standing, and affluence as an inter-national (hyphenated) and international/global language are also hardcore ground realities and students can neither be deprived of its access nor restrained from transcultural association, transit between global workplaces and, which is why and where English has its role. In such a demanding context, prioritising the political terrain over educational objectives and complex discourses impedes augmentation in learning and mobilising through social spheres, keeping aside the stark realities of learning and teaching that doubly obstruct the benefits and exploration of the world of work, global business opportunities, or individual goals.

In the context of the present paper, it is learning English communication skills or Business English, particular aspects of the English language and the skills required in using the language for specialized purposes. English language education (ELE) is an umbrella concept, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is primarily a subset of it and does not refer to English or ELE as a whole; English communication skills illustrate specific career and academic purposes, under the banner of ESP, to assist learners in specific tasks for employment purposes.

We will examine the prevailing concept of ESP to understand its nature and implications.

In *English for Specific Purposes*, Thomas Orr (Orr, 2002) defines the nature of ESP as:

The ESP that is primarily taught or researched consists of spoken and written discourse in academic and workplace settings, which is unfamiliar to most native and nonnative

speakers, and thus requires special training. Specific-purpose English includes not only knowledge of a specific part of the English language but also competency in the skills required to use this language, as well as sufficient understanding of the contexts within which it is situated.”

Further,

English that the average native or nonnative speaker commonly knows is called English for general purposes (EGP). General-purpose English comprises the common core of English that is shared by most of its speakers. Learning general-purpose English typically begins at home for native speakers and in the ESL/EFL classrooms for nonnative speakers. When taught, EGP is presented as a linguistic system to a wide range of learners for application in the most general of potential circumstances, whereas ESP is taught as a tailor-made language package to specific communities of learners with highly specialized language needs. (Orr, 2002)

As mentioned earlier, the findings from the employability surveys, industry-academia interviews, expert views, backlash candidates’ interview performances of young aspirants, as well as real-life work performances, inept professional presentations, and incompetent communication of those already employed vis-à-vis protocols/standards/requirements, which often result in financial and face loss for organizations because of poor or miscommunication. This necessitates looking closely at these stark contradictions that exist within the (English) language learning environment because neither job-appearing nor on-the-job performance feedback/s can be dealt with in isolation.

2. Comprehensive Review of Scholarly and Industry Landscape

Mercer Report (Marsh McLennan, 2024-2025, p. 6) states: “Executives understand that workforce upskilling/reskilling and employee well-being continue to be critical to success.” “Reskilling/upskilling to keep up with the demands of customers and/or an evolving business model/transformational technology.” (Marsh McLennan, 2024-2025, p. 2) is the top risk to business growth in 2025. Further,

Two in five workers believe that the world of work is fundamentally broken, and one in four wish they didn’t have to work at all. People crave the peace of mind that comes with job security and financial well-being — staples that become increasingly important during times of upheaval. (Marsh McLennan, 2024-2025, p. 2)

Mona Khare (Khare, 2022) quotes:

The United Nations (UN) has made employability one of its four priorities for national policy action on youth employment, the UN’s Youth Employment Network has suggested that all countries need to review, re-think and re-orient their education, vocational training and labour market policies to facilitate the school to work transition and to give young people . . . a head start in working life. (UN, 2001, p. 4).”

Khare probes further. The new wave of linking ‘education to work’ resultant from emerging labour market needs, evidence of higher salaries (income elasticity of higher education higher than all other levels of education) and better-quality jobs with rising ‘skills hierarchy’ from the primary to the tertiary levels (World Bank 2002; Chadha, 2004; Varghese, 2012; Khare, 2012) has been quite evident in global education debates in the past decade. (Khare, 2022)

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) consistently highlights the importance of soft skills, which include communication, discussion, debate, critical thinking, higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork as essential 21st-century skills. It emphasises the proficiency and/or amelioration of these skills to be employ(able).

Krishna Sen (Sen, 2009) writes: “The practical problem in implementing this grand Nehruvian design lies (as in all former colonies) in the hegemonic impact of Western culture, most powerfully symbolised by the English language.” With the Nehruvian vision, Sen refers to integrating all of India’s ‘pasts’ in a new narrative of a potentially resurgent nation– the long and culturally prolific pre-colonial epochs with their Sanskrit, Buddhist, and Islamic (Mughal) heritages, the synchronous evolution of the regional languages and cultures, and the more recent colonial and Eurocentric inheritance.” (with reference to Nehru’s *The Discovery of India*, *ibid.*)

Sarah et. al. (Sarah Buschfeld, 2024), in their research proposal, highlights: “According to statistics, around 1.5 billion people the world over speak English—either as a native language or as a second language. The English can vary greatly and have unique local features, depending on the region. Its spread beside other local languages can also bear tension: languages may inspire, change, or even displace each other.”

Lavanya (Proctor, 2014) further reviews: “Blommaert observes that language is “intrinsically connected to the processes of globalization” (2010:2) and suggests that we question “the forms of inequality that characterize language in the era of globalization” (2010:21).”

Times of India.com (Desk, 2025), in its electronic media reports,

Effective management is crucial for the success of any organization. A manager’s ability to handle setbacks, foster open communication, and maintain composure in challenging situations significantly impacts team productivity and morale. In a series of posts on social media platform X, Vembu emphasized the importance of resilience, approachability, and the ability to handle bad news constructively. (Desk, 2025)

Indian Defence Review (IDR), a quarterly journal, publishes (Arezki, 2025): “A recent study from the University of Stavanger, Norway, has revealed a disturbing fact: **40% of GenZers are losing their proficiency in handwritten communication.**” It also mentions: “It’s not just about losing the ability to write by hand—this could be the beginning of the **collapse of meaningful communication** as we know it.” And for such a persistent loss, it states: “The rise of *instant messages, tweets, and status updates* threatens to erode the very foundation of thoughtful, reflective exchange.”

Enhancing Employability is the prominent title of a report prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Bank (ILO, 2016) for the G20 Employment Working Group (EWG), in association with the ILO and the International Monetary Fund. The report also mentions, “But in all countries, they are affecting what kind of work is done, who carries it out and where and how it is carried out...”. It advocates the need to develop ‘transferable skills’ (“skills that can be used in most occupations – e.g., ICT skills, problem-solving, team working, etc., including core skills”).

Unstop Talent Report 2025 (UnStop , 2025) states that “**83% of engineering graduates have no jobs, or internship offers...**” and “A significant 51% of GenZ professionals seek multiple income streams through freelancing and side hustle, with the number rising to 59% among B-school students.”

Krahn et. al. (Harvey Krahn, June 2002) observes: "However, the employability skills discourse rests on two assumptions that have not been subjected to empirical analysis. The first is that many young people are deficient in employability skills, mainly because schools do not sufficiently emphasize such skills. The second is that students lack awareness of the skills needed in the world of work. "

Lavanya (Proctor, 2014) observes: "I examine discourses about English and its relationship to access, empowerment, national capital, and international possibility in India, resting my analysis on the idea that English is "a language of inequality". (Wee, 2012).

3. Research Gap

Although a significant amount of cross-sectional research has been conducted in the field of learner anxiety in the learning of English communication skills, there is a palpable gap in capturing mental health issues in the trajectories of learning and teaching English communication skills, of management and technical education programmes, rigorously intervened by the intricate cause-effect relationship between the primary stakeholders, curriculum structure, pedagogical perspectives and embedded support system/services (for both learners and facilitators) and industry support when considering a holistic view in building a skilled workforce.

4. Overall Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to:

- identify and analyze the various aspects of English communication skills development and the issues of mental health;
- comprehend and contextualize the challenging factors within the learning environment that may impact employability preparation and/or exacerbate learners' mental health issues.

5. Research Method

The study is qualitative, allowing the researcher to document lived-in-service experiences, direct classroom observations, and reflective narratives from a specific group of learners and teachers about their learning journey and professional involvement. It has thoroughly examined relevant instances and contexts in SCOPUS, a Web of Science-indexed, peer-reviewed database, scholarly articles, and valuable reports, aiming to capture the essence of experiences through inductive reasoning. Data were also gathered via semi-structured interviews and both formal and informal discussions using open-ended questions, enabling detailed exploration and interpretive analysis. The study employed purposive sampling, selecting learners and teachers who, with informed consent, could offer comprehensive insights within the relevant context. To uphold research ethics, the identities of respondents have been kept anonymous, and confidentiality has been maintained. Additionally, the researcher's positionality regarding the topic has been reflected in the development of the paper.

6. Interpretive Insights and Discussion

In discussing the present topic, an analysis of the terms of references, the wisdom of observations and the ideological contents involved in the scholarly and industry works reflect the deepening necessity of enabling the learners of management and technical education to improve more on the non-technical skills/soft skills/leadership skills/management skills/problem-solving skills/communication skills as cardinal to balance the professional needs properly and/or to be productive in an organization. It is one side of a coin. An encouraging work environment fosters higher job satisfaction and reduces burnout, leading to a sense of well-being, best performances and a greater sense of care and responsibility.

There is no doubt that workforce upskilling or reskilling is essential to keep pace with the changing world of work and for the country's economic transformation. It does not question the importance of developing critical thinking skills, handling setbacks, open communication, or working harder to transfer skills across domains and professional environments. Instead, it questions how this need should be addressed and how learners can be enabled to transfer skills. While discussing these demands, the paper presents some basic facts and realities that often fail to adequately reflect the main point of the discussion, or are frequently overlooked or omitted, resulting in a muddled and unconvincing argument.

▪ Well-being and Engagement

Let us consider the phrases “employee well-being continues to be critical to success” or “keep up with the demands of customers and/or an evolving business.” How can we determine employee well-being, and what parameters are involved? How do we keep up with the demands and shifting expectations of customers or an evolving business? Are there any real-time assessments or training available at all levels? These reactions seem oddly contradictory; although an organisation relies on and is interconnected with all its services, each area often has its own diplomatic interpretation and reluctance to understand the connectedness. The concept of financial well-being has a prominent impact on other aspects of well-being, especially psychological well-being. This is, perhaps, the most significant gap in the system. Pay disparity or inequity, the gender pay gap, and poor compensation packages are among the worst phenomena. Ironically, digital technology and GenAI are more in the limelight than pay disparities. Interestingly, finance is a powerful tool used to exert dominance and control, not money alone, but an influential strategy. How are employee engagement and mental health to be assessed in this context? Is it not likely to impact teaching and learning? The concept of mental health appears vague and inapt here. The main mental health issues discussed here include language anxiety and emotional health outcomes resulting from learning and organisational environment, teacher motivation and involvement in promoting psychological well-being, as well as academic and employability goals.

As we proceed, we will focus on gaining an understanding of mental health.

Mental health does not exist on its own. It is an integral and essential part of overall health, which can be defined in at least three ways – as the absence of disease, as a state of the organism that allows the full performance of all its functions, or as a state of balance within oneself and between oneself and one’s physical and social environment. (Sartorius, 2002)

The Society for Health Education and Promotion Specialists (SHEPS, 1997) suggests that mental health also involves feeling positive about oneself and others, feeling glad and joyful

and loving. Mental health, like mental illness, is also affected by biological, social, psychological and environmental factors. (SHEPS, 1997). Thus, mental health is a condition that impacts one's social, family, workplace or peer life and is closely linked with physical health (Dinesh Bhugra, 2013) and a state of positive mental health will lead to positive performance and relationships, while being at ease with oneself.

Environmentally speaking, a disappointing monitoring system also afflicts. The information gathered at the ground level and that conveyed at hierarchical levels varies invariably. This often leads to improper hierarchical interference and disturbed delegation and/or functioning. Just as genuine reputation, recognition or appreciation matters in the psychological well-being of employees, the reverse is also distressful and affects negatively. These days, we measure employee engagement. How are the dishonoured moral parameters placed in employee engagement assessment? Or, how is engagement defined? Do our academics train us about coping (or not coping) with these environmental characteristics?

▪ **Teacher and Employability**

The sine qua non responsibility to prepare and enable young aspirants for the world of work lies with teachers, and quality teaching has always remained at the centre of discussion. There is no argument that facilitating, guiding, mentoring student learning, and imparting training are the identities of a teacher. However, full and intensified participation and/or involvement of teachers, and their skills in imparting quality education and training, are either questioned or a central point of discussion. Ironically, supporting teachers in professional development or concerns about their mental and physical health is hardly given any importance despite these being crucial for efficient performance, employee retention and educational goals.

Teachers play a significant role in preparing students for employability by integrating skills into the curriculum. Innovative and flexible pedagogical approaches, classroom tasks and management, using ICT-enabled tools and techniques, time and context-specific guidance and counselling, supervision during internships, project-based teaching/learning, personal care and support, awareness of present-day evaluation techniques, feedback, and corrective measures to enable students develop 21st century skills, stress management, while encouraging self-awareness, self-reflection, compassion, accountability, growth mindset (team, organisation, self), etc., are only a few of their responsibilities aside administrative works. Identifying each student's uniqueness, challenges and strengths to help prepare them for employability requires an empathetic, understanding, social-emotional and supportive environment, and organizational support for teachers' psychological well-being, heightened engagement, proactive participation, and performing with patience and resilience.

Instructional leadership significantly impacts the professional development of teachers (Lee, 2020) whereas occupational stress negatively impacts a teacher's performance. (Antoniou, 2006)

Unclear expectations, inconsistency, indecisiveness, lack of opportunities for input, lack of follow-through, and failure to provide essential resources are examples of stress-provoking administrative behaviors. Other sources of stress requiring extra work included excessive paperwork, lack of preparation time, lack of materials, extra duties (e.g., committee work, noon-hour supervision), student absences, travel (from school

to school), teacher incompetence and irresponsibility, and parental interference and non-support. (BLASE, 1986)

COVID-19 furthered the challenges of coping with digital technology, in need of proper training (alongside a good deal of resistance to learning it), and available systematic support.

Apart from huge teaching loads, administrative work, admission responsibilities, desk work, etc., are an integral part of teacher service (leaving aside their non-public life and the humongous time, which is mostly neglected, and energy spent in local commutes). Contrarily, seeking an opportunity to apply for in-service training or participation in refresher courses and conferences is a real-time challenges that come not only in the approval process but with financial support as well. How employee engagement or mental well-being is calculated in such or similar challenging contexts, many of which may not be known or brought to the limelight altogether. What skills are to be acquired, and how are they to be transferred from academic teaching-learning situations to non-teaching responsibilities or employment environments? It is understood that the construct 'job satisfaction' has no well-established definition. (Evans, 1997). However, talking about mental health, people's behavioural aspects, and varied sarcasm involved if one does not belong to the same community or predefined standard/s, affects interpersonal relationships, academic atmosphere and collaboration.

It is pivotal to systematically evaluate these in assessing the ideological contents of employability, employee engagement or planning a policy to promote and monitor a healthy work environment. In constantly combating these challenges, priorities face a shift and discussing instructional plans, collaborative practices, work encouragement and engagement are likely to suffer. Doubtlessly, self-motivation and enthusiasm are likely to suffer a hiccup at some point.

Perhaps so, training one's mind may be a more pertinent skill to train our students during academic years, besides developing awareness of the cognitive domain and technical skills needed in the world of work. The questioning mind and curiosity of the present generation in trying to understand what and how to deliver work may significantly contribute to higher job performance. Training and informing about relevant job sectors and industries could be helpful. Job seekers need to be informed about the work, environment, and stress management mechanisms, particularly in a rapidly changing socioeconomic context or evolving business situation. These are indications of a range of considerations for employability guidance.

Discussing the need for such activities is hardly given importance, nor is the role and awareness of cultural aspects in which the work environment is situated. They vary in their functions and the way they are to be carried out. Here again lies an anomaly. Are the employability skills for multifarious and evolving employment or work the same? A teacher also needs to be aware of these while imparting training to students. These needs sustained professional development.

Can a teacher showcase or impart the same skill set in teaching and admission alike? Or, which skills are to be transferred and which are not, while juggling between the responsibilities? Are teachers the only stakeholders who need upskilling or reskilling? Teachers are part of a system that depends on mutual collaboration and cooperation of others in the education system. Effective communication among the different stakeholders in an organization or institution is imperative, and a collective goal contributes to shared outcomes. Cases and evidence are enough about the cost of poor or miscommunication, which is paid at an organisational or individual level. Effective communication is the linchpin and cannot be mastered via a tablet.

- **Purpose-driven English Proficiency and Employability**

In the context of this discussion, this paper also examines the role of English communication skills in the pretext of the debate about enhancing employability skills. Industry and skill reports have repeatedly mentioned that English communication skills are a key skill that students lack prominently, as evidenced in their workplace performances, especially in formal presentations, business correspondence, interpersonal communication, business negotiations, client handling, etc. It needs to be mentioned here that learning English communication skills indicates learning English for specific purposes (ESP) and/or professional requirements. This necessitates a background/contextual study of the 'subject' in question to understand its social and psychological affiliations.

First, let us take a brief look at the status that English has in India.

The teaching-learning situation of English in India has also been a journey through contested phases. Historically, it has a colonial past; but in the post-colonial period, it is taught as a first, second, and also as a third language in India, besides being the official language of some States and an 'associate official language'. However, there also runs an undertone that English is a foreign language (not among the native tongues of India), regardless of whether we are more inclined toward foreign food codes, foreign culture, foreign products and brands, foreign destinations or foreign educational tags. Amazingly, it needs to be mentioned here that the presence of English education dates earlier than the British colonial rule in India.

In the context of the present paper, it is learning English communication skills or English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The nature of these specialised purposes is to qualify for employability prospects and/or industry requirements to fare well in the global market. English communication skills have specific perspectives vis-à-vis management and technical education programmes, which differ from learning English for General Purposes (EGP).

The journeying (as of date) of English into the complicated hierarchical system has a hegemonic impact and is also not barred from the political, social and economic consequences. However, the evolution of English to its speedy demand may have been caused by its social standing in a globalised era, in which the flow of its access is fleet-footed. Because of the complexity of the various statuses, the learning of English is at odds with the soaring demand for English communication skills in the world of work, on equity issues and the supportive role of education (primary) stakeholders, which is crucial for knowledge-driven social and economic development while partaking in globalization.

Internationally, English has the status of a 'link language', a 'global language', and an 'international language'; it is a marker of 'status quo' and social mobility. Interestingly, the English language is used in diplomacy at the international level to propagate the nation's foreign policies efficiently and in conducting trade and commerce globally. "India is the second largest English-speaking country and one of the largest English book-producing countries in the world..." (Sen, 2009). Yet, internally, it is still in a state of flux.

The real-life situations are even more distressful in management and technical education programmes when it comes to learning English communication skills. The industry and several other employability and skill reports have poignantly expressed their requirement for English communication skills as one of the core skills. Yet, the management and technical education curriculum explicitly offers English communication as a non-core or elective course. Hence, even before preparation for employability begins, the course structure indicates an indirect

relationship with employment/employability as reflected in the 'core' and 'non-core' subject divisions as class positions. There is likely to be a mismatch between the supply and demand of shaping scholastic outcomes because the hierarchical structure itself triggers psychological differences and imperfections in the minds of learners due to their marginalised treatment although it is the linchpin.

Side by side, lacuna in English Communication skills may not always be the outcome of qualified and employed educators, but, in many instances, they are taught by untrained research scholars who are not only novices in teaching but may not belong to the domain of language education. They conduct such services as part of their teaching allotments during their research programme. Instances are plenty where English is taught by teachers from different domains, considering the subject does not require special training for instruction. In many institutional contexts, the same may be observed in teacher recruitment and subject allocation for a specific purpose, where recruiting at a low salary package (business) matters the most, challenging learners' futures. A learner's school education cannot be seen in isolation in preparing them either for employability or for developing English proficiency, as these foundations cannot be postponed until higher education.

The recent news of Hindi teachers teaching English, Science, etc. in schools of Haryana (cannot be singled out as a lone incident) is a case in point (Bhakat, 2025). How would these children stand in the employ(ability) framework when they pursue higher education or job criteria?

The shortage of trained teachers in the relevant field is another significant fact. This calls for the encouragement of learning opportunities, teacher training and professional development for upskilling and empowering them in their relevant work.

Power skills have always been an important part of workplace learning, and their importance has only grown more urgent as the global workforce navigates the changes of the last few years. Enabling employees to develop power skills related to communication, collaboration, and change leadership is key to building an agile business and a strong company culture.

— Melissa Daimler, Chief Learning Officer, Udemy (Udemy Business Report, 2022)

Let us now look at other important aspects. It is about second language learning -the fundamental aspects of language learning -the factual and critical aspects of second language acquisition (L2), here, English. According to Dr N S Prabhu (2019): "In striking contrast, attempts to learn a second language need a lot of effort, vary in success between learners (even between siblings) and rarely reach the level of first-language (L1) acquisition." Chomsky, in his proposition for Universal Grammar, mentions that there may be some commonalities in the way we learn languages, be the first or a second language. Some commonalities indicate there may be some common structure (debated) to acquire a language. However, second language acquisition is complex by nature and differs more in the acquisition process than the mother tongue, depending on several factors -exposure, psychological, cultural, linguistic, etc. Again, Prabhu mentions, "We are all familiar with what looks like a gulf of difference between a child's acquisition of the mother tongue and any subsequent attempt to acquire a second language..." The point to be noted here is that language acquisition and language learning are different processes and involve different states of mind -subconscious and conscious phases of mind, respectively. Hence, the learning and teaching of a second language (here, non-native) is way more challenging and requires one's abilities to function and make the most of the opportunities available.

There is also empirical evidence of the construct of *foreign language anxiety* (FLA) that learners experience when using a second language. In India, the foreign language anxiety concerns English, which is mainly studied as a second language, while also being studied as a first and third language. However, there runs a psychological undercurrent of its foreign (non-native) origin. MacIntyre and Gardner (Gardner, 1994) defined FLA as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second/foreign language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning, or the worry and negative emotional reaction arousal when learning or using a second/foreign language.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (E K Horwitz, 1986) were the first to conceptualise FLA as a unique type of anxiety specific to foreign language learning as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. Psychological well-being is a key dimension of mental health. The social, individual differences, health-related behaviours, classroom environment created for teaching-learning, previous experiences and the practices involved cannot be separated from one another, and the role of environment alongside pedagogical practices plays havoc in the process of preparing learners to be an able and skilled workforce. Here lies the need for critical attention.

Additionally, technological innovations are on a scale never seen before, and working with technological assistance requires vigorous training, as well as infrastructural and financial support in many cases. How are employee engagement and mental health to be assessed in this context? With the tremendous advancement of technology or Generative AI, the world is within one’s palm reach, interconnected as a global village. In such a situation, “It is now accepted as a fact that English, as a cause and consequence of globalization, currently serves as the most widespread means of international and intercultural communication that the world has ever seen.” (Seidlhofer, 2011). In this, online content and a substantial number of websites account for a significant majority in English. “Nobody is likely to deny that English has, in one way or another, in some shape or form, become a global lingua franca in the contemporary world.” (Seidlhofer, 2011)

Apropos of the discussions above, at the core of the discourses, rests my question of how to leverage English communication skills and/or soft skills to enable learners to compete and thrive in the labour market or evolving business. The debate and/or the discussions about employability skills are focused on employers’ reports of shortages or requirements in their organizations or industries. How to address the prescribed mental divide between ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ subjects in the hierarchy? Or, how are ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ defined? Why do non-technical/ communications skills matter at all, then? Or, how to address the differences between credit points as explicitly outlined in the curriculum within the employability framework? It identifies a twofold problem: the impact on morale and the psychological effect on learning and aggravating aversion towards learning English.

...and poor work readiness among HEGs emerging from three kinds of gaps between the higher education sector and the labour market. These include awareness gaps, perception gaps, and skills gaps.”

-(Khare, Graduate Employment and Sustainable Employability Skills in India, 2020)

Given the ever-existing complicated status of English and its implementation concerns, the difficulties in language learning (in particular, L2), the mental divide (would prefer to name it

so) between 'core' and 'non-core', the burden of a huge syllabus completion within a very short period followed by several evaluations, unmatched curriculum to the present day's world of work, teaching-learning strategies, lack of qualified educators in the relevant field, scarcity of quality trainers in the field, financial allocation for teacher development activities, large class size (60 at the base to 120/180 intakes), time management issues, credit point discrepancies, and lack of hierarchical coordination, and the already existing anxiety towards the learning of English addressing the 'three kinds of gaps' is, unhesitatingly, not a one-teacher show.

Unquestionably, teachers have a direct influence and responsibility in building a skilled workforce, but taking them to the classroom and delivering their best potential with care and positive mental health requires a collaborative and coordinated effort of other stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes in developing employability skills and human values. "The paper proposes a sustainable employability framework entailing mutually flexible and coordinated efforts among all stakeholders to bridge these gaps through skilling, deskilling, and reskilling for imparting sustainable employability skills to HEGs."

(Khare, Graduate Employment and Sustainable Employability Skills in India, 2020)

▪ **Internship and Employability**

Let us not turn a deaf ear to the other side of the coin in the trajectory of the preparation of a skilled workforce. The internship opportunities offered by industries to students as a glimpse into the world of work are, nevertheless, crucial. A students' survey regarding their internship experiences is a must and can be seen as one of the deciding components of preparation for 'employability'. It is, expectedly, a small-scale point of view of the world of work to be taken up by young aspirants in the future. The internship experiences need to be radically improved and upgraded to be at par with the current dynamic economy and fast-changing business environment, while creating an inspiring experience, vis-à-vis the complicit role of institutes.

Internships are mandatory these days, which provides valuable exposure. However, a survey of students' internship experiences would strongly reveal widespread exploitation across industries, such as unpaid work, extended hours, handling colleagues' pending tasks, and questionable behaviour towards trainees. Those unwilling to work without pay are often denied even the opportunity.

This relates to mental and physical health, with financial issues being more severe due to costs for transportation and food. In some cases, the stipend, although provided, is just the bare minimum. The internship situation is especially challenging for women, given the changing nature of the workplace. What about safety, mobility, and rent costs for those travelling to different states for internships? These issues are also supported by the researcher's in-service observations and students' reflections on their experiences, which can be seen in open discussions on online platforms focused on business and employment. Perhaps, applying Durkheim's concept of 'collective consciousness' might be relevant in the ongoing debate.

The relationship between educational outcomes and the labour market is directly proportional, clearly distinguishing their framework for employability requirements—general employability skills, job-specific technical skills, and a set of personal attributes. In acquiring these, a supportive environment would motivate students not only to achieve notable academic results but also to help reduce employability gaps and develop self-measures for psychological well-being.

Above and beyond, the incessant advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), digital technology, and edtech necessitate the need for intensive teacher participation and training for upskilling/reskilling and improved application in classroom situations. In many cases, where students are first-generation learners or institutions lack fundamental resources and infrastructure measures to respond to emerging skill needs, it takes time to yield results. It cannot be imbibed overnight.

Hence, students' lacuna ('skills mismatch', 'skills gap') in English communication skills, etc, is not a simple binary of quality teaching versus employability. The insights offered in this article suggest working in 'difficult circumstances' (Anderson., 2021) has certainly contributed much to these gaps, and they need to be addressed so as to be harmonised with changing skill requirements. Alongside, funded training of in-service teachers by qualified trainers, followed by their rigorous skill assessments, could foster high performance; likewise, teachers' curiosity and awareness of upward trends should also be self-regulated and self-motivated. However, this demands strict monitoring as well as appropriate recognition and incentives throughout their working lives. Management and administrative authorities also need to be aware of the changes and their demand to foster an environment of collective cooperation.

There are several critical aspects underpinning the concept of employability. Briefly, let us look at some of them to understand the employability framework and the essential competencies and/or skills identified through rigorous research.

Employability skills, as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO):

The skills, knowledge, and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off, and enters more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle. Individuals are most employable when they have broad-based education and training, basic and portable high-level skills, including teamwork, problem-solving, information and communications technology (ICT), and communication and language skills. This combination of skills enables them to adapt to changes in the world of work. (Brewer, 2013)

However, the concept of employability has been applied to a range of different contexts, and to those in work and those seeking work (Ronald & Collin, 2005), yet the concept may be fuzzy and lacking clarity and specificity of meaning. (Römgens, 2020) The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the ILO and the World Bank Report (ILO I. O.-o., 2016) advocates the need to develop *transferable skills* ("skills that can be used in most occupations – e.g., ICT skills, problem-solving, team working, etc., including core skills") to be adopted by those seeking a job and existing job holders.

The main objective of the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC), according to the India Skills Report, 2019 (6th ed.), is to provide skill development training in professional skills. Two primary skill sets emphasised to meet employability needs are Domain Skills and Soft Skills. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020) highlights soft skills such as communication, discussion, debate, critical thinking, higher-order thinking, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork as the most sought-after 21st-century skills.

According to the India Skill Report 2019, the demand for skills has changed, and NEP 2020 emphasises developing the ability to communicate, discuss, and debate with critical thinking, depth learning, improve problem-solving abilities, teamwork, social engagement, develop a

scientific temper, be aware of citizenship values, life skills, and advocates the participation in community service programmes to suit the demanding changes. In this, globalisation is the driving force augmenting these shifts, and the tremendous advancements of Generative AI and technology are opening its doors to an expansion of the domestic Indian market.

English communication skills are no longer an additional requirement but a core skill alongside an individual's traits and attributes. Having said that, a curriculum prepares students for employability as the course contents are expected to be linked and directed to career management skills to enable the students to be successful in their professional choices. But a semester or two (out of eight semesters in BTech/six in BBA and four in MTech/MBA) cannot effectuate more than a syllabus completion. Simultaneously, does that help in the retention and sustained practice of communication efficacy? Psychologists may help us understand the psychological nuances much better, in creating a more supportive learning and teaching environment towards the desired goals.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, there is no denying that students often face recruitment boards with insufficient preparation or less than their expectations. Various government and industry surveys and reports have consistently highlighted the inefficiency of management and technical education learners in meeting employability standards, with English communication skills ranking among the most critical criteria. Teachers, too, may have fallen short of their expected performance and quality of service.

The study discussed the harsh realities that act as stumbling blocks in the process of developing a skilled workforce, which remain overlooked and less frequently discussed, but need to be addressed seriously. The study notably emphasised the complexities involved in learning and teaching English, which coexist alongside learners' anxiety about mastering the language, as well as work environment factors and their cause-and-effect relationships. These contribute to situational distress, impacting the overall mental health of both learners and facilitators. Therefore, caution must be exercised to validate and assess the employability gap; from a psychological perspective, it is essential to include an analysis of factors affecting emotional health and academic or professional performance. Consequently, both employability (pre-employment status) and post-employment employee engagement become vital in maintaining and enhancing mental health. There is no room for counter-accusations or immature justifications. We cannot risk our human resources nor our nation's growth and honour in the face of global competition. We are a 'collective consciousness' and not merely a passive solidarity in fulfilling our social roles.

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