



AI cannot replace English language skill

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THE modern workplace is being reshaped by three forces at once: artificial intelligence (AI), globalisation, and digital transformation. At the centre of this is AI, positioned as the greatest force in workplace transformation. Yet the promise of AI as an equaliser — a tool that could bridge communication gaps, draft emails, and summarise reports — has not played out as advertised. According to a new survey of human resources (HR) decision makers across 17 countries, AI adoption appears to be doing the opposite: raising the need for English proficiency.

As reported in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Global English Skills Report by Educational Testing Service (ETS), 81% of employers globally say that integrating AI tools increases the need for English proficiency among workers. In India, this figure reaches 87%. “In the workplace, communication is what enables alignment, whether it’s explaining ideas, collaborating across teams, or making decisions. AI can support the process, but it cannot replace the need for context, judgment, and clarity. That’s where human communication continues to create value,” said Ajay Pratap Singh, Regional Director (South Asia), ETS.

Although communication ability in job descriptions was listed under “soft skills” for years, 97% of employers in India say that English proficiency is more important today than it was five years ago, while 84% believe a lack of it places candidates at a competitive disadvantage. Employers remain optimistic about AI’s potential but say it cannot compensate for poor communication skills. Workers still need clear language skills to frame inputs, interpret outputs, and apply them effectively. Strong English proficiency also prepares employees for emerging tools and future innovations, allowing them to stay relevant as technology and roles evolve.

“AI can act as a language crutch by assisting with drafting emails and resumés, but candidates may not fully grasp what is generated, leading to miscommunication. With reported cases of AI hallucinations, a lack of language proficiency makes it harder to identify inaccuracies. In India, where English is not the first language, AI-induced fatigue in learning will lead to reduced productivity and collaboration,” says Satish Pari Baskaran, soft skills and English language trainer.

Across the globe, organisations using standardised English assessments report better collaboration, greater growth and improved efficiency. Communication is being viewed as a measurable business capability, and clear communication is becoming a non-negotiable workplace skill.

Speak
up

A recent report suggests demand for language skills remains critical in workplaces