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Engineering in local language? Report card shows more takers in TN, Andhra, UP

recruiters across four states to find what's behind the uptick and where the challenges lie: from availability of non-English textbooks and language teachers to questions over job prospects. In some colleges, these vernacular programmes have become a popular draw for students from English-medium schools, too, given that it's easier to get a more "coveted" department.

The big picture: Opening the door

In line with the new National Education Policy (NEP 2020), the AICTE approved 1,140 seats for BTech programmes in 11 regional languages — Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati, Malayalam, Bengali, Assamese, Punjabi and Odia — across 18 engineering colleges for the academic year 2021-22. Three of the 18 were government institutes and 15 were private. The move was part of the plan of including native languages as the medium of instruction in higher education to help increase access and promote the "strength, usage, and vibrancy of Indian languages".

To begin with, engineering courses were offered in only five languages — Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi — in 2021-22. And while colleges in Rajasthan, UP, MP, Haryana and Uttarakhand offered BTech in Hindi, those in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra and Tamil Nadu offered the course in their respective regional language. Of 1,140 seats, the data shows, only 233 seats were filled by these 18 colleges that year.

During the academic year 2022-23, however, the AICTE approved 1,440 seats for engineering in the local language in 22 colleges — four government, 18 private — and almost half of 683 seats were filled with programmes in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu.

Among the colleges that recorded a rise was Pune's Pimpri Chinchwad College of Engineering, a private college which offered admission to 65 students for its four-year computer engineering course in Marathi in 2021-22 against an approved intake of 60. With the AICTE allowing an additional division if needed, its enrollment increased to 74 students in 2022-23.

According to Nilkanth Chopade, deputy director of the college, English-medium students form the majority in the Marathi course. "More than 90 per cent are from an English-medium background. It is a demand and supply situation. For example, there is huge demand for Computer Science and if students fail to get a seat in an English programme, they opt for the Marathi course," said Chopade.

The Noida Institute of Engineering and Technology (NIET), a private institute in Greater Noida, had only 19 students in the academic year 2021-22. But it filled 68 seats against the approved intake of 60 in the computer science course in Hindi in 2022-23.

NIET director Vinod Kapse credited the "favourable" response to their "multifaceted approach". "We provide the students with field development programmes and programmes (by online providers like) Coursera so that they are well-equipped for placements," he said. NIET has also made English

neering in the local language in modules provided by the British Council mandatory.

Similarly, Erode Sengunthar Engineering College, a private institute in Tamil Nadu, started a Mechanical Engineering course in Tamil with just 10 students in 2021-22 but managed to fill 49 seats against the approved intake of 60 seats in 2021 and 2022. Enrollment in Computer Science and Engineering in Telugu at the NRI Institute of Technology (NRIIT) in Andhra's Vijayawada, too, rose from 22 students to 50 against the approved intake of 60 in the same period.

Low numbers in Gujarat, Karnataka

Even as some universities did well, others had trouble getting in even one student.

For instance, courses offered by institutes affiliated to the state-run Gujarat Technical University (GTU) failed to net a single enrollment. A case in point is Gujarat Power Engineering and Research Institute (GPERI), which offered 120 seats in Gujarati in core specialty courses like mechanical, civil, electrical and computer science engineering for the academic year 2022-23. In an effort to "boost" enrollment, GPERI even organised special counselling sessions for students at government schools and diploma colleges, besides those in Adivasi hamlets in and around Mehsana district.

GTU Registrar K N Kher said students have not yet warmed up to the idea. "Many students in the area (Mehsana) are not comfortable with English and we have tried to explain to them that learning will be more effective if done in a regional lan-

guage. At the diploma level, we have allowed students to study and write their exams in Gujarati... There is a perception among students that if they pursue BTech in Gujarati, they will miss out on placement opportunities," Kher said.

The "waning" appeal of core specialties may have contributed to the problem, too. "Another reason could be the declining popularity of core branches like mechanical, civil and electrical engineering, even in English," said Vivek Patel, the head of GPERI's Mechanical Engineering Department.

Then, there's the lack of dedicated textbooks and teachers for these courses, prompting some of these colleges to work out indigenous solutions. "Most of the books that we use in classrooms are in English. However, our approach is to gradually make students comfortable in English as they move on. In the first year, we explain the concepts in 75 per cent Telugu and 25 per cent English. This ratio becomes 50:50 in the second year and in the third year most of the curriculum is taught in English. Apart from that, AICTE has developed a tool for translating content in regional languages," C Naga Bhaskar, the principal of NRIIT, a private institute, said.

The college has adopted a similar approach to the recruitment of teachers. "We asked them whether they would be comfortable teaching in Telugu as well as English. Only those who were comfortable in both were hired for this programme. We have hired nine teachers so far for our regional language programme," Bhaskar said.

The principal, however, ac-

knowledged that "most of the parents are still worried if their child will be able to get a job at the end of this programme". "I assure them that the recruiters are focused on skill rather than the medium of instruction in the classroom," Bhaskar said.

Another challenge, he said, is for students who wish to pursue higher studies abroad. "They may face difficulties because, according to the eligibility criteria of several foreign universities, students must have studied their bachelors in the English medium. Currently, there are 10-15 per cent students who wish to study abroad and I have communicated this issue to AICTE," Bhaskar said.

Language cannot be barrier: AICTE

The AICTE, meanwhile, is hopeful of the tide turning gradually.

Rajive Kumar, AICTE member secretary, said, "We have started faculty development programmes in Indian languages. We have given students options (to choose regional language courses). Books are being translated in regional languages and efforts are being made to equip teachers to teach in regional languages. This multi-dimensional approach will surely help increase interest among students, but it will happen gradually. This is not likely to show results in just two years."

Kumar said, "When we spoke to industry partners, no one expressed their unwillingness to hire students who had studied in Indian languages. It is our mindset that makes us think the industry will not hire us."

'Not a major

constraint' for recruiters

Asked about a recruiter's perspective, RC Bhargava, chairman, Maruti Suzuki India, said, "An HR person would be more adept at answering this question, but common sense would dictate that if a company prefers to conduct its work in a particular language, then it would want to hire engineers who understand and can read that language. Wouldn't it be a handicap if the engineer cannot speak the language fluently to interact with his colleagues? At Maruti, we deal with the Japanese. The Japanese have learned English. So our employees are usually fluent in English and Japanese."

Naushad Forbes, co-chairman Forbes Marshall, a leading steam engineering and control instrumentation firm, said, "In second and third tier engineering colleges, students are usually taught in regional languages but take tests in English, essentially practicing bilingual education. Offering engineering degrees in regional languages isn't a significant change for them. From the market's perspective, although English is essential for most engineering jobs, it's something young people can easily learn. I don't view this shift as a major constraint."

In India, "being bilingual is best", said Manish Sabharwal, co-founder of TeamLease Services, one of the country's leading HR consultants.

"Being bilingual (English and a native language) improves labour mobility and there is a wage premium for being bilingual. In tech, especially the soft-

ware sector, knowing English language matters given that 99 per cent of the work happens in English. While it's a good thing that the education system is being inclusive (with the introduction of tech programmes in native tongue), people should also realise that there is optionality to multilingualism," Sabharwal said.

"A majority of our recruiters are based in India, and their emphasis is on skills over medium of instruction. Nevertheless, we have dedicated lectures to make students proficient in business English communication, which will improve employability," said Sansar Singh Chauhan, head of Computer Science Engineering at GL Bajaj Institute of Technology and Management in UP's Noida, which started its Hindi programme in 2021-22.

● **In Noida, it's a hit — with some help from 'Hinglish'**

the language. Nevertheless, I hold the lectures in Hindi with a mix of English to explain concepts better... The nature of the programme makes it necessary to hold bilingual discussions," Sagar said.

This private institute, affiliated to Dr A P J Abdul Kalam Technical University, is one of the success stories of the Government's move to introduce engineering degree courses in regional languages. Over the last two years, the institute nearly doubled its enrollment for the Hindi programme from just 39 students in 2021-22 to 70 in 2022-23. It not only filled the approved intake of 60 in 2022-23, but also offered supernumerary seats for students from economically weaker sections (EWS).

Located in the National Capital Region (NCR), a majority of the institute's students are

from English-medium schools. "Our students are aware of the importance of English and most also write their answer scripts in English," said Sansar Singh Chauhan, head of the Computer Science Engineering (CSE) department.

But the advantage, he said, is also for those who could not get into English-medium engineering programmes. "There is no difference in these two programmes, rather an option to be able to write in Hindi if not comfortable with English," he said.

Several students at the institute echoed Chauhan's line.

"I had applied to an English-medium programme elsewhere but the cutoff was so high that I could not get admission there. I decided to opt for Hindi instead here. The programme is the same as English," said Divya Gaur, a second-year student.

"Computer Science is all about technique and coding, the practical knowledge of which remains the same for both CSE core students and Hindi students," said Shreya, another second-year student.

It's no surprise then that in one of the two Computer Science Engineering (CSE) sections in Hindi, 64 out of the 72 students had completed Class 12 from English-medium schools.

According to college officials, the admission process remains common for both CSE core (English) and CSE (Hindi). "But students with a better percentile or a higher rank are given preference to join the core programme and the ones with comparatively lower ranks and percentiles take up CSE Hindi. One must hold a minimum of 60 per cent in their 12th grade for admission and a rank in the Joint

Entrance Examination to join these courses at the institute," said an official.

According to teachers, students refer to textbooks prescribed for core subjects in English while the mode of teaching is in Hindi. "No translated material has been provided by the AICTE to us and we don't have any plans of translating any material as CSE is a very technical subject. Code is in itself a universal language. So there we saw no immediate need to translate the curriculum," said Chauhan, the CSE head.

The big question: placement?

The key question, however, is recruitment with the first four-year batch scheduled to graduate next year.

"There is no difference in

learning material and the curriculum as teaching happens from English textbooks but companies will ask, 'Why B Tech in Hindi?' This might be a drawback as we may not be seen as candidates who are not fluent in English," said a second-year student.

It's a concern that finds resonance at the institute's Placement cell. Manju Khatri, director, Training and Placement, said, "Companies have their own prescribed way of recruiting students.

There are no relaxations or exceptions for CSE Hindi students. Both will have a common procedure for campus placements. After clearing all the technical grounds, it all depends upon the mental ability of the students, the skills they learn, how one would perform in the personal interview.

Court extends judicial custody of Kejriwal, Kavitha

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

A DELHI court on Tuesday extended the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and BRS legislator K Kavitha till May 7 in the money laundering case, related to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.

Kejriwal, who was arrested by the ED on March 21 in the excise policy case, had been sent to Tihar jail on April 1 after the court of Special Judge Kaveri Baweja sent him to judicial custody till April 15. His judicial custody was extended till April 23.

Kavitha was arrested by the ED from Hyderabad, in the excise policy, on March 15.