

English,
from SI/1

“Technology is evolving at an exponential rate and those who struggle with English might find much-needed support in generative AI. But we have to think, if the proficiency is not embedded and merely augmented, what sort of Filipinos will we be producing?” she added.

For GPCCI’s Mr. Aguilo, further collaboration between the business community and local educational institutions could be explored, focusing on key areas where the use of English is critical.

For his part, NordCham’s Mr. Lundqvist said: “We believe the proficiency in English is not only a competitive advantage for the Philippines but also a vehicle for the many Filipinos to attain higher education and a career either locally or abroad.”

“As foreign employers, we will be able to provide better training and more opportunities for personal growth for Filipinos with good language skills,” he added.

NEGLECTED, OVERTAKEN

Sergio R. Ortiz-Luis, Jr., president of the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, said that the country can no longer take pride in English proficiency as one of its advantages in the global market.

“We should really start taking it seriously. We have to improve our curriculum. *Napababayaan na* [It’s being neglected],” Mr. Ortiz-Luis said in a phone interview. “It is the language of commerce, investments, and trade. We are being overtaken.”

George T. Barcelon, president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said various groups have been urging the Department of Education (DepEd) to focus on improving the English language skills of students.

“We have slipped quite far behind on the international assessment regarding education, so learning is a priority. Public and private schools

should be on top of this,” Mr. Barcelon told *BusinessWorld* via phone call.

In a separate phone interview, Rene E. Ofreneo, professor at the University of the Philippines Diliman School of Labor and Industrial Relations, said that the decline in English proficiency reflects a general crisis in education, which must be strengthened at the basic, secondary, and tertiary level.

Hyper Island Singapore’s Ms. Pacquing noted that maintaining the Filipinos’ English edge means revisiting the incentives, objectives, and key results of the English education faculty.

“Beyond formal and structured education, what are the societal and cultural scaffolds we have in place to drive towards English proficiency?” she said.

Audrey B. Morallo, assistant professor of the language education area at the University of the Philippines College of Education, noted that the education sector

must continuously improve how Filipino students learn the language.

“Teachers must ensure that English is taught in such a way that students will be able to use the language in meaningful communication and to achieve whatever purposes they have for learning it,” Mr. Morallo said.

“Technological advancements today can provide students with opportunities to be exposed to the language and use it for meaningful communication,” he added.

Mr. Morallo also said that teacher education institutions must ensure qualifications for teaching the language, as well as providing opportunities for professional development.

He said that resources need to be provided to the education sector. “Quality materials, equipment, technology, teacher development, etc. can be provided if the government allocates sufficient resources for education. That will also allow the hir-

ing of more education support personnel.”

ADDRESSING THE GAP

Amit Jagga, senior vice-president and country leader for the Philippines at Concentrix + Webhelp, said that English proficiency is central to the industry’s competitiveness and sustainability.

“There are also several aspects to language proficiency such as comprehension, effective information processing, active listening, cultural understanding (nuances and idiomatic expressions of English-speaking customers), clear articulation, and quality communication,” Mr. Jagga said on key standards and practices which must be upheld.

Mr. Jagga said that Concentrix + Webhelp employs interventions during pre-hiring, hiring, and further training development to address the potential loss of English-proficient workers.

These include one to two weeks of “near-hire” training

for basic conversational English, on-the-job training for basic customer interaction skills, and government-academe partnerships for specialized customer experience courses during the pre-hiring phase, he said.

The company, according to Mr. Jagga, will launch its Turo Guro program before the yearend, which will provide free English training to school teachers nationwide.

At the hiring phase, Mr. Jagga noted that language assessments for native- or near-native-level English communication are done, alongside a skills training enhancement program for client-required communications tests.

Further training development includes a three- to seven-day customer experience training, communication skills workshops, and tech augmentation, he said.

Advanced learning through bots and automation is also used for new hires to master conversation flow and resolution of top customer concerns, he added.



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