



Global English Skills Report

The strategic role of English proficiency assessments in the evolving workplace



Table of contents



Introduction	3
Executive summary	4
Part 1: The current state of workplace English proficiency	7
Part 2: English proficiency and assessment benefit pillars	13
Part 3: The future of workplace English proficiency	25
Summary of key findings	29
Appendix	30

Introduction

Over the past few years, the global workplace has transformed dramatically. Remote work, AI integration and shifting economic centers have fundamentally changed how businesses operate — and with it, how English proficiency impacts business success. Today, promoting strong English language skills in the modern workplace is more critical than it has ever been, with assessments playing a crucial role.

To better understand the dynamics between the evolving global workplace and the importance of English skills, ETS surveyed 1,325 HR decision makers across 17 countries to capture their perspectives on these themes.



Executive summary

The current state of workplace English proficiency

Four themes emerged when we explored the current state of workplace English proficiency.



Theme 1: Globally, workplace English skills are becoming more important

Growing pressure on organizations to achieve strong employee English proficiency has fueled greater demand for education and assessment solutions. Among the 1,325 HR decision makers we surveyed, 9 in 10 agree that English language proficiency is critical to the success of their organization — and 92% agree that English language proficiency among employees is more important now than it was 5 years ago.

Theme 2: The growth of AI does not diminish the importance of English

While AI has been a focal point for businesses over the past year, AI's capabilities have not mitigated the need for English proficiency. Across each of 4 dimensions of English skills, the majority of employers — about 6 in 10 — say AI is unable to compensate for a worker's lack of competency. Moreover, employers say that the growth of AI is increasing the need for English proficiency — workers must be fluent in English to effectively interact with AI and fully capitalize on its benefits.

Theme 3: Organizations use a variety of assessment approaches

Given the pervasive need for English fluency in the workforce, organizations are turning to English assessments. Employers say they are most likely to use assessments for hiring (78%), followed by pre-training or education for employee development (71%). Roughly 2 in 3 employers also use assessments for promotion readiness and post-training, or for employee development education. Employers are slightly more likely to rely on standardized assessments rather than internal assessments.

Theme 4: Adopting more accurate and higher quality measurement solutions optimizes the path to workplace English proficiency

Many HR decision makers believe assessment solutions can be improved — particularly when it comes to internal and informal measurement tools. Standardized third-party assessments are most likely to be rated as very effective (55%), outperforming internal assessments (51%) and informal evaluations (47%). Accuracy and quality are cited as the biggest shortcomings of current assessment tools.

English proficiency and assessment benefit pillars

Globally, there is an imperative for organizations to prioritize English proficiency in the workplace. Many organizations are utilizing English language assessments as part of their development initiatives. The benefits of English skills are far-reaching across multiple pillars and are better realized among organizations using assessments.



Benefit Pillar 1: Facilitating global collaboration

As commerce models and business dynamics evolve, organizations across the globe are becoming more interdependent — the increase in cross-border collaboration within organizations has created a need for seamless communication via a unifying language.

Among organizations that use standardized third-party English assessments, 80% say they are highly satisfied with their employees' ability to build new business partnerships — vs. 62% of those who do not use standardized third-party English assessments.



Benefit Pillar 2: Unlocking organizational growth

Rapid changes, greater competition in the global marketplace and a more English proficient client / customer base impose pressure on organizations to implement adaptive strategies, including strong English language skills, to maintain a strong competitive position. 86% of respondents agree that organizations that have employees who are not fluent in English are at a competitive disadvantage.



Benefit Pillar 3: Driving employee engagement and efficiency

Key reasons for this perceived competitive disadvantage include operational costs and employee productivity. 83% of respondents agree that hiring candidates with insufficient English skills imposes costs on their organization — such as increased turnover, decreased retention or lower productivity. The majority of employers agree that improving English language proficiency can mitigate these challenges.



Benefit Pillar 4: Catalyzing AI optimization

Likewise, there is a perceived disadvantage in the race to adopt technology and AI. 81% of employers say integration of AI tools increases the need for workplace English language proficiency — because strong English skills help organizations more expediently and effectively capitalize on technological advancements.



The future of English in the workplace

English assessments will become an integral part of organizations' strategies to drive business growth. With increased focus on government mandates requiring English competency in secondary education, there is potential to bolster progress toward achieving universal workplace English proficiency.

Four themes emerged when exploring the future of English in the workplace.

• Theme 1: Increased applicant assessment

As global collaboration and technological innovations accelerate growth across industries, organizations must become more discerning in evaluating job candidates' English skills. 81% of HR decision makers say a more competitive job market increases the need for workplace English proficiency, and 84% believe that companies will administer English assessments for all new hires within the next 5 years.

• Theme 2: Prioritizing English education and assessment

There's urgency in the need to support and develop English proficiency in the workforce — it's not a *when* issue, it's a *now* issue. 82% of respondents say that more global collaboration creates greater urgency for English proficiency — and 63% of global organizations have allocated \$50K+ USD in their annual budget for English skills assessment and development.

• Theme 3: Realizing benefits of standardized assessments

Assessments help benchmark and gauge English proficiency performance — and they play a crucial role in informing hiring decisions and professional development paths. 89% of respondents agree that scores from English language assessments taken during university are valuable to their organization when screening job candidates. In particular, standardized assessments are most strongly associated with greater employee productivity, professional growth and employee morale.

• Theme 4: Positive outcomes of government English policies

Regional policies that require English proficiency to complete secondary education are associated with more favorable business outcomes. 83% of employers who say their government mandates English proficiency are very satisfied with employees' ability to build new business partnerships (vs. 76% of those who do not), and they are 13 percentage points less likely to frequently experience erosion of trust.

Detailed findings

Part 1: The current state of workplace English proficiency

The goal for many employers is strong English proficiency, particularly among new hires. Roughly 9 in 10 say they make this a priority when hiring — 91% seek to hire university graduates with English language skills, and 89% say that scores from English language assessments taken during university are valuable in screening job candidates. Furthermore, 92% of employers agree, English language proficiency among employees is more important now than it was 5 years ago.

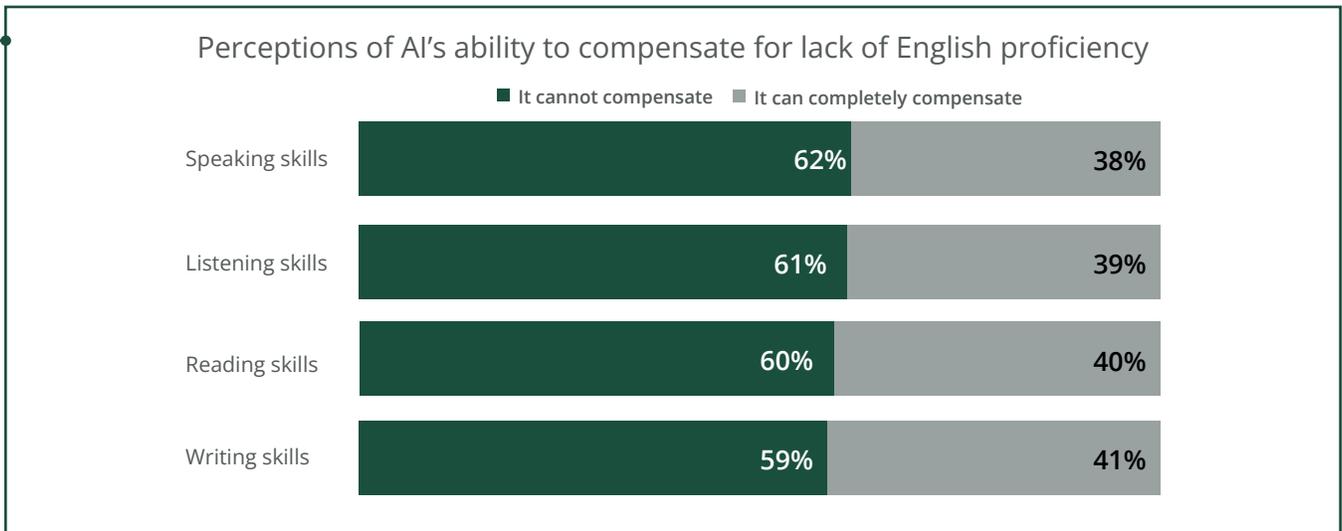
HR Focus on English Proficiency

92%
agree

English language proficiency among employees is more important now than it was 5 years ago



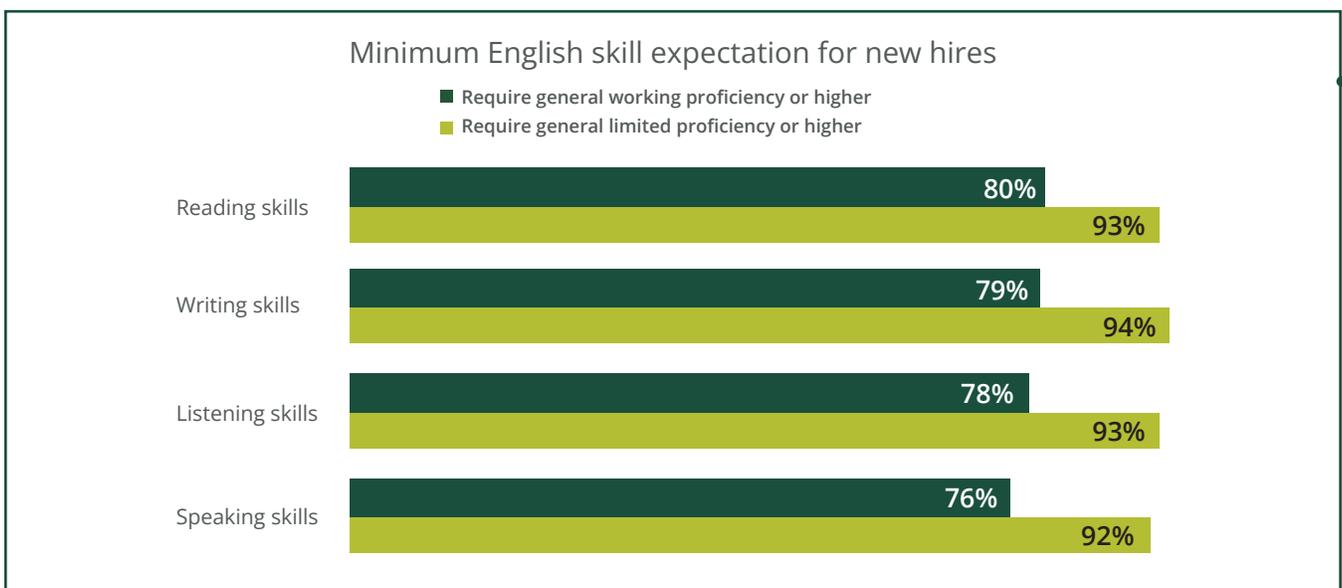
While employers are optimistic about the potential of AI tools for English language translations, most employers believe that AI will not be able to compensate for a lack of English skills. This is particularly true among smaller employers: 65% of organizations with fewer than 2,500 employees (vs. 59% of employers with more than 2,500 employees) believe AI will be unable to fill the gap in English speaking skills and writing skills (63% vs. 55%).



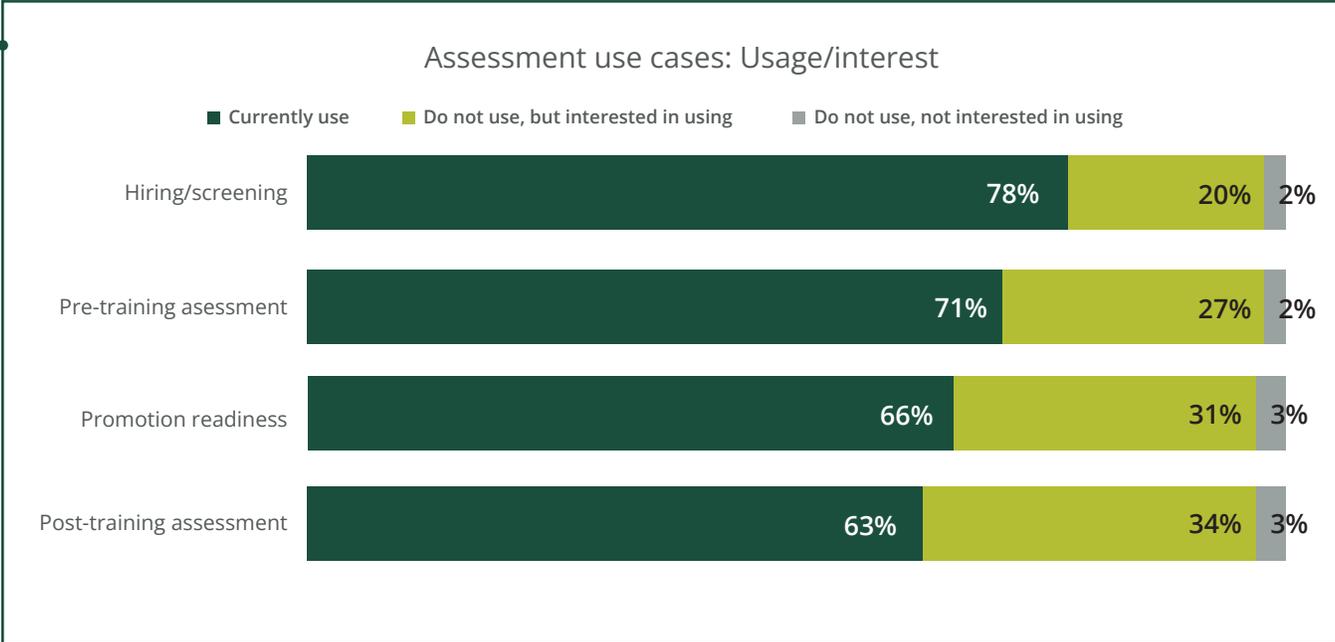
As a result, employers have high expectations for proficiency in all four dimensions of English language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

More than 9 in 10 employers desire at least a limited working proficiency of English (i.e., use of English in familiar scenarios, such as routine workplace texts or conversations), and more than 3 in 4 require at least general working proficiency (i.e., nearly fluent use in technical and complex situations) across all measures of English skills.

Among international organizations and those with more than 2,500 employees, expectations are even higher; these employers are more likely to desire general and limited working proficiency across all English skill areas. Within global finance, trade and business services industries, 81% of employers require general working proficiency in speaking skills (vs. 76% overall).



There is wide use of assessments across organizations globally, and nearly all who do not yet use assessments say they are interested in using them. Employers are most likely to use them for hiring / screening (78%), pre-training assessment (71%) and promotion readiness (66%).



In most cases, employers use a combination of assessment types, and third-party standardized assessments are used most often.

	Hiring/ screening	Pre-training assessment	Promotion readiness	Post-training assessment
Standardized assessments from a third party (e.g., TOEIC, etc.)	59%	58%	54%	61%
Internally developed formal assessments	56%	56%	56%	51%
Informal assessments (e.g., conversations, observations, etc.)	54%	54%	48%	47%

International organizations are more likely to use standardized assessments for hiring / screening (61% of international organizations vs. 53% local organizations). Among HR decision makers, 55% rate third-party standardized assessments as very effective. These assessments outperform internally-developed formal assessments (51%) and informal measurements (47%).



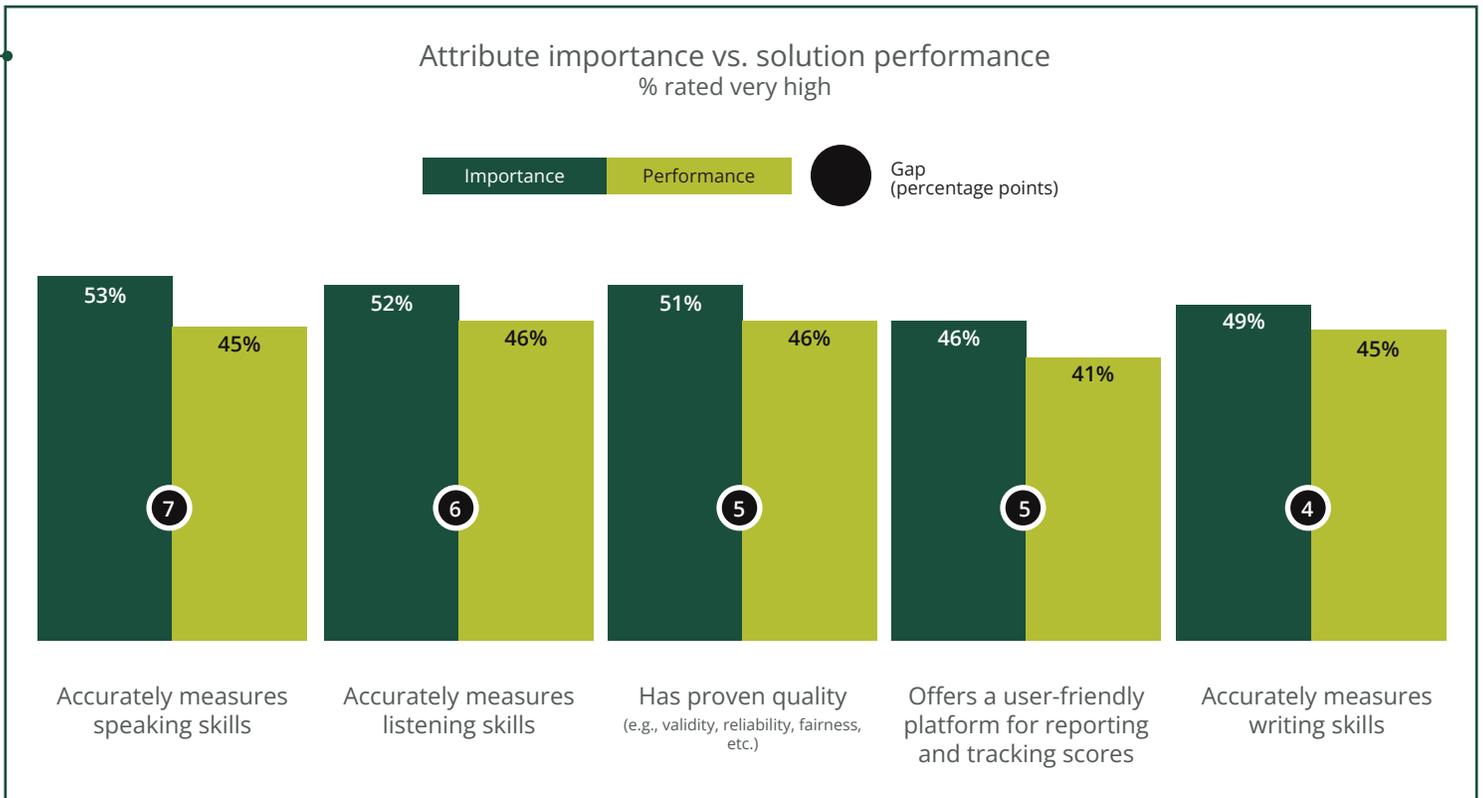
standardized assessments from a third party (e.g., TOEIC, etc.) as **very effective**

Internally-developed formal assessments (51%)
Informal measurements (47%)



When it comes to finding candidates with a high level of English language proficiency, 44% say it is a pressing challenge. Organizations also report a lack of effective screening tools and education programs that they consider essential for evaluating job performance. 89% agree that “my organization needs to implement more comprehensive English language education (training or learning) programs for our employees to succeed in their roles,” and 68% agree that “my organization does not currently have a good way to screen new hires for English language proficiency.”

The need for more effective screening tools is consistent with evaluations of assessment solutions, where HR decision makers indicate gaps in attribute importance vs. performance. The largest performance gaps in assessment solution attributes are in measurement accuracy, quality and a user-friendly interface.



Performance gaps are not the only challenge organizations face when looking to implement an assessment program. Nine in 10 respondents report at least one barrier to adopting English language assessment tools. The top barriers to implementing assessment tools are time constraints (36%), organization-wide scaling (36%), finding a trusted provider (36%), challenges integrating tools with existing platforms (32%) and low prioritization among leadership (28%).

English assessment and education solutions: Implementation barriers

% selected



90% of HR decision makers

report at least 1 barrier* to adopting assessment tools

*includes additional barriers not shown in the chart



Part 2: English proficiency and assessment benefit pillars

Organizations that promote English proficiency see far-reaching benefits across multiple pillars:

- Facilitating global collaboration
- Unlocking organizational growth
- Driving employee engagement and efficiency
- Catalyzing AI optimization





Pillar 1: Facilitating global collaboration

Employers recognize that greater global collaboration is driving an increased need for English language proficiency.

82% of organizations agree, more global collaboration creates more need for English proficiency



Meetings with foreign teams and synchronizing projects require the use of English, as does logistics monitoring.

– France, Manufacturing - Electronic

English, as the lingua franca of international business, is the standard medium for multinational team meetings, email exchanges and project management, and directly determines the efficiency of cross-cultural collaboration.

– China, Manufacturing - Electronic

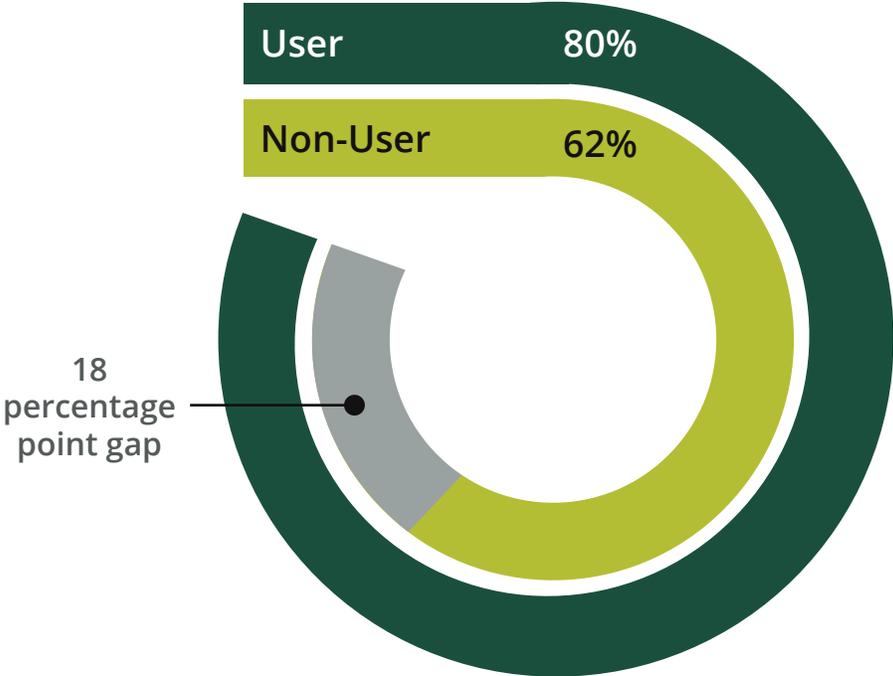
[English language proficiency is important in the workplace] to communicate effectively with colleagues and employees, understand the work and documents, expand opportunities for professional development and be able to compete and succeed in a global and interconnected work environment.

– Saudi Arabia, Finance/accounting/banking/security

Those who use standardized third-party assessments are more likely to report high satisfaction with employees' ability to build new business partnerships vs. those who don't use standardized third-party assessments (80% high satisfaction vs. 62% high satisfaction).

They also associate standardized third-party assessment use with improved collaboration within organizations: 77% of users express high satisfaction with employees' ability to collaborate within and across teams, vs. only 61% of non-users.

High satisfaction with employees' ability to build new business partnerships
Among users and non-users of standardized third-party assessments





Maintaining and strengthening customer relationships is essential to organizational growth, yet many companies struggle with customer turnover. Roughly 1 in 3 employers say customer turnover is a pressing challenge for their business, and 74% of organizations say that miscommunications due to lack of English proficiency have strained customer relationships. Fluent communication with customers is fundamental in fostering a strong business relationship — while miscommunications often erode trust in the partnership.

Strengthening business relationships heavily rely on fluent communication.



74%
agree

employees within my organization have experienced miscommunications with clients due to lack of English language proficiency

As customers become more fluent in English, organizations must meet — and exceed — their proficiency. More than three-fourths (78%) of organizations believe greater consumer access to resources for English education increases the need for workplace English language proficiency.

78% of organizations agree

greater consumer access to resources for English education increases the need for workplace English language proficiency



Since many of our partners and customers speak English, this makes it easier to develop closer ties between us.

– Brazil, Manufacturing - Machinery/fine machinery

Strong English communication builds professional credibility and confidence when interacting with diverse stakeholders and customers.

– India, Service - Health/hospital/medical research

English skills are essential for communicating with foreign-language customers. Having English in your employees' vocabulary creates a professional image and makes your company shine even more.

– Germany, Professional services (consulting/engineering/IT/marketing)

Increased global competition also fuels the need for strong English skills. Among HR decision makers, 90% believe their organization's ability to deliver a strong performance is directly tied to English proficiency. They also view organizations whose employees are not fluent in English as being at a competitive disadvantage (86% agree).

90%
agree

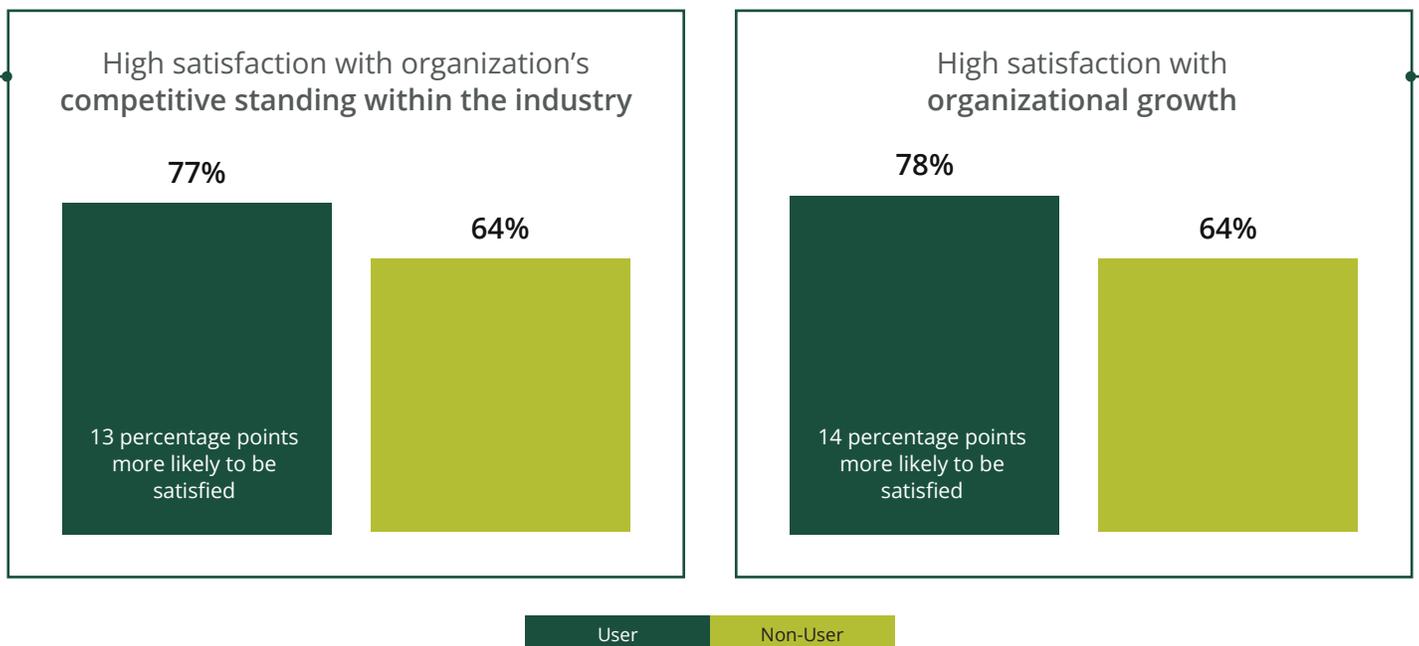
English language proficiency is critical to the success of my organization



Employer satisfaction with organizational performance outcome metrics is associated with the use of standardized third-party English language assessments.

Performance metrics further support these perceptions. There is a positive relationship between employer satisfaction with organizational performance outcome metrics and the use of standardized third-party English language assessments. Relative to non-users, organizations that use assessments are 13 percentage points more likely to report high satisfaction with their organization's competitive standing within their industry and 14 percentage points more likely to report high satisfaction with organizational growth.

Positive business outcomes
Among users and non-users of standardized third-party assessments



Pillar 3: Driving employee engagement and efficiency



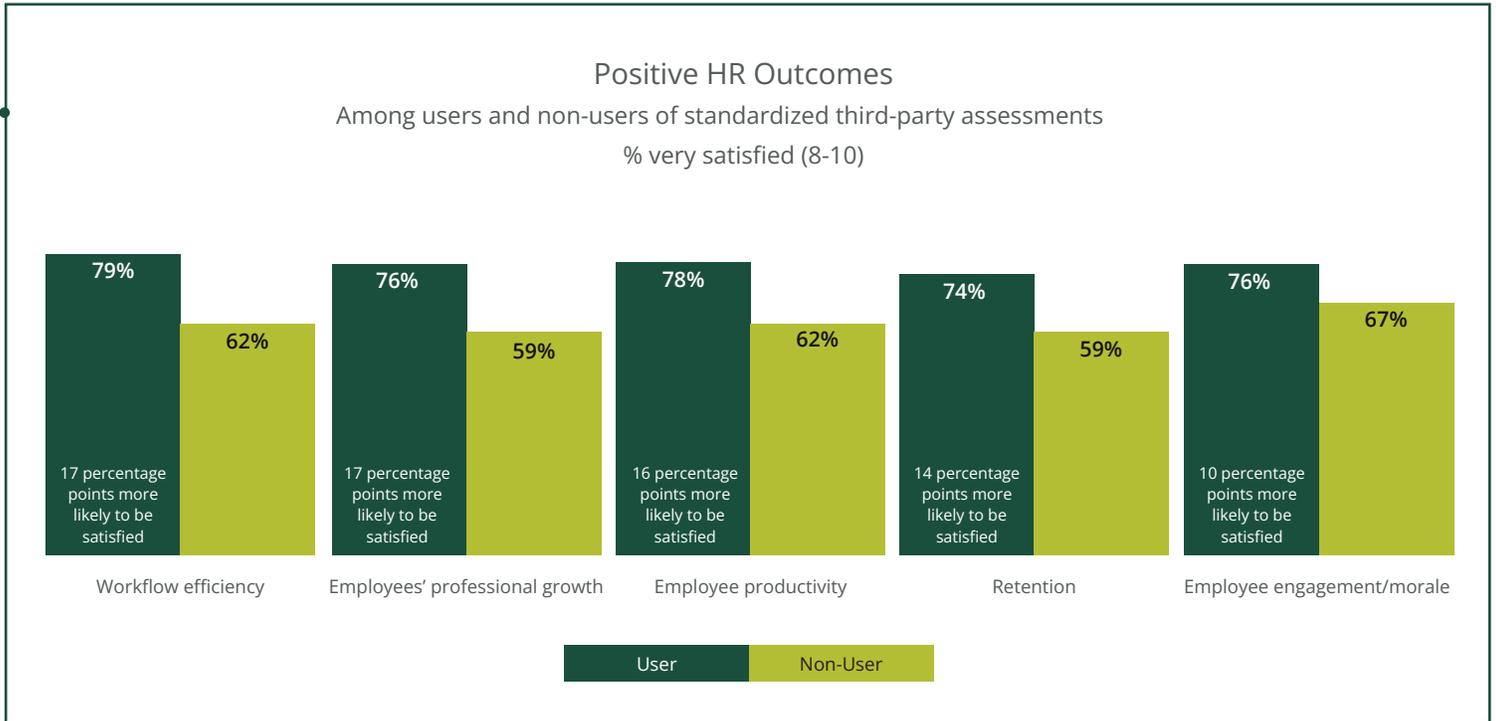
Across the globe, organizations are navigating challenges with efficiency and employee engagement. Top-of-mind hurdles for employers are operational costs (49%) and employee productivity (40%). More than 4 in 5 say overall efficiency would be improved if effective English assessments were used to screen candidates during the hiring process, and 83% agree that “hiring candidates who prove to have insufficient English skills imposes costs on my organization, such as increased turnover, decreased retention or lower productivity.”



89%
agree

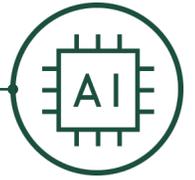
my organization would be more efficient if we used better English language assessments during the hiring process

Relative to non-users, those who use standardized third-party assessments report more positive outcomes in employee performance and satisfaction, most notably around workflow efficiency and employee professional growth where there are +17 percentage point differences, followed by employee productivity (+16 percentage point) and retention (+14 percentage point).



A macro factor in workforce trends driving greater English proficiency is the growth in remote work opportunities. With it comes the need for a common language that is understood across the globe. Overall, 3 in 4 respondents say they believe the prevalence of remote work elevates the importance of English proficiency. Among those in the global finance, trade and business services, this sentiment is even higher, at 81%.

Pillar 4: Catalyzing AI optimization

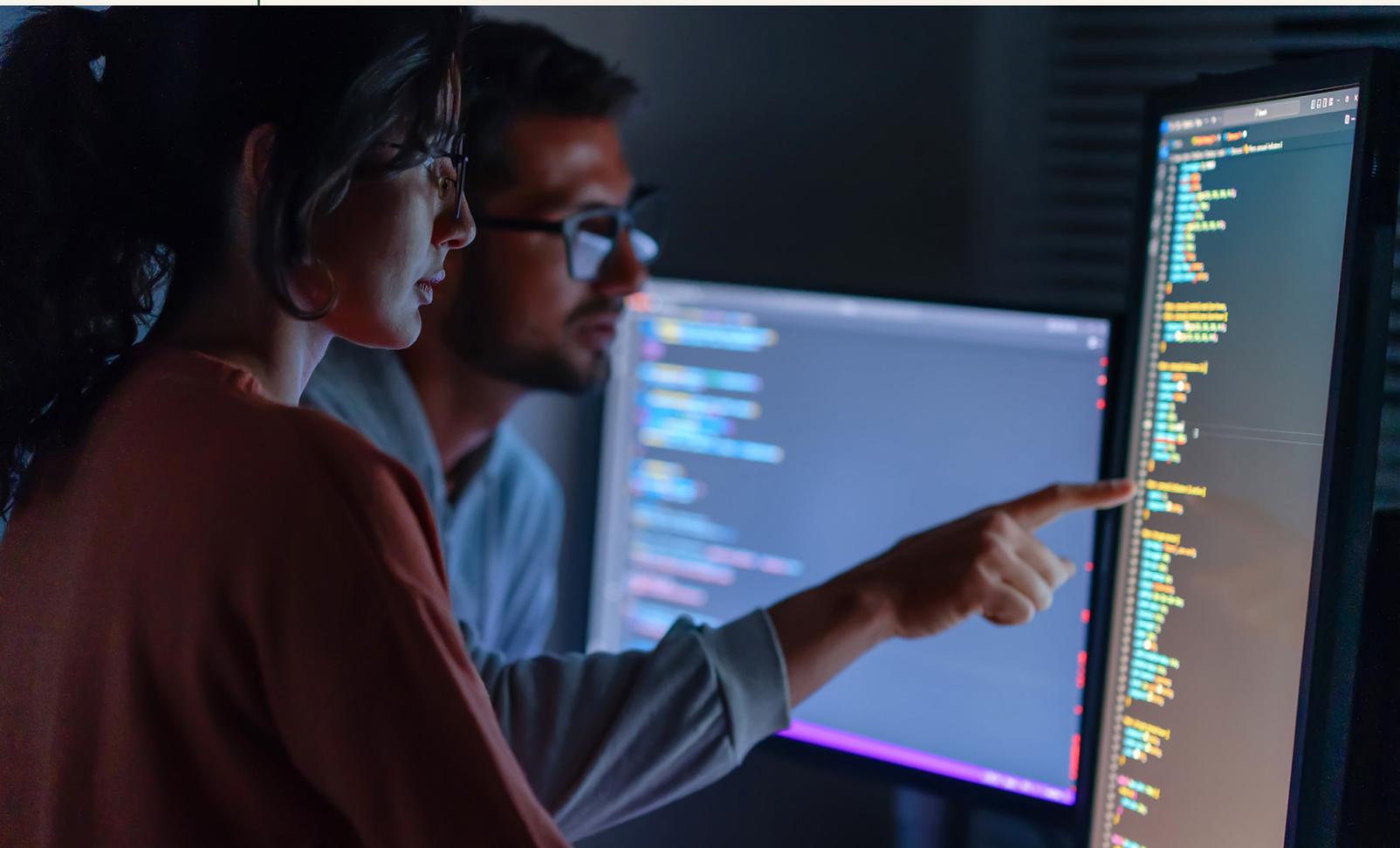


Over half (52%) of organizations say keeping up with technology and AI is a pressing challenge. While finding candidates with technical skills is a high priority (48% prioritize), finding employees with English skills is even more important. 81% of organizations say that the integration of AI tools increases the need for workplace English proficiency, indicating successful integration of AI into day-to-day work is highly dependent on the ability to interact with AI tools in English.

81%

of HR decision makers say

integration of AI tools increases the need for workplace English language proficiency



Roughly 9 in 10 employers say they believe English skills are necessary to use AI tool interfaces, generate effective prompts and determine the accuracy of AI output. Furthermore, as role responsibilities shift due to AI automation, improved English skills facilitate this transition and are key to helping workers remain relevant in the workforce.

Influencers of greater need for English proficiency

% selected as very/somewhat influential

92%

The need to use a greater **variety of AI tools**
(those with English-only interfaces and/or requiring input in English)

92%

The need to **determine the accuracy** of AI-generated information

91%

The need to generate **effective prompts** for AI

90%

Shifts in role responsibilities due to AI automation



English is essential in global businesses, helping employees interact effectively with growing artificial intelligence tools that primarily operate in English.

– Morocco, Finance/accounting/banking/security

The user interfaces of tools such as programming and data analysis programs are usually in English.

– Germany, Manufacturing - Chemicals

Being proficient in English can help employees adapt to new tools and innovations more easily.

– India, Transportation

Technology software applications are all in English so everyone must understand it.

– Vietnam, Manufacturing - Machinery/fine machinery

Part 3: The future of workplace English proficiency

Assessments are useful tools for measuring English language proficiency, a critical skill needed to thrive in the global economy. There is also potential for government mandates requiring English competency in secondary education to bolster progress toward achieving broader workplace English proficiency.

For workers, demonstrating English language competency is key to helping them stand out in an increasingly competitive job market. Among employers, 81% say a more competitive job market increases the need for workplace English proficiency. Roughly 30% of HR decision makers say they believe organizations across the globe are currently administering assessments or using assessment scores from university transcripts for new hires — and more than 50% predict assessments will become an essential candidate screening tool within the next 5 years.



Timeline for adoption of English assessments

Organizations will **administer English language assessments** for all new hires

29%

It is currently happening

55%

In 5 years or less

Organizations will **use scores from English language assessments** from university transcripts to screen when hiring

29%

It is currently happening

54%

In 5 years or less

Assessments will also be used to benchmark and track proficiency levels among current employees, typically as part of English education programs — 43% of organizations are focused on employee development and training. And even more organizations have budgeted accordingly: 63% of organizations say they allocate \$50K+ USD annually for English skills assessment and education. The healthcare industry is twice as likely to have a substantial budget, with 30% of healthcare organizations investing more than \$500K USD annually on this initiative (vs. 14% total).

Current annual budget* for English assessments & education

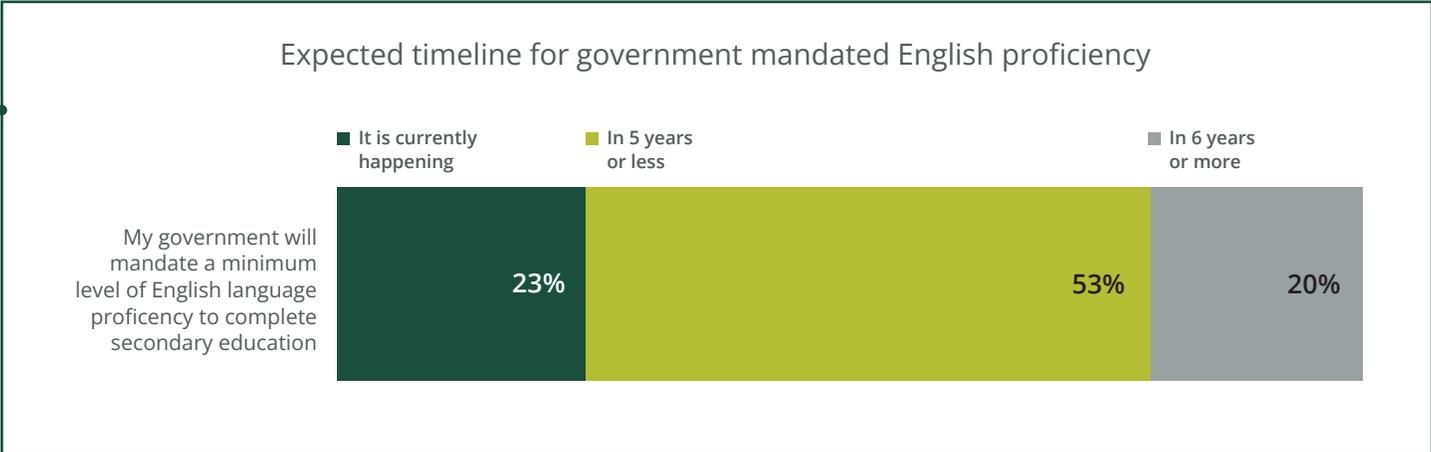
Less than \$10K	15%
\$10K-\$49K	21%
\$50K to \$99K	24%
\$100K to \$499K	26%
\$500K+	14%

\$50K+
63%

*In USD

Globally, 84% of organizations predict that within 5 years, all organizations in their country will commit to investing in English language assessments and education for their employees, and the majority of employers envision a future in which policy mandates create an English fluent workforce-ready candidate pool.

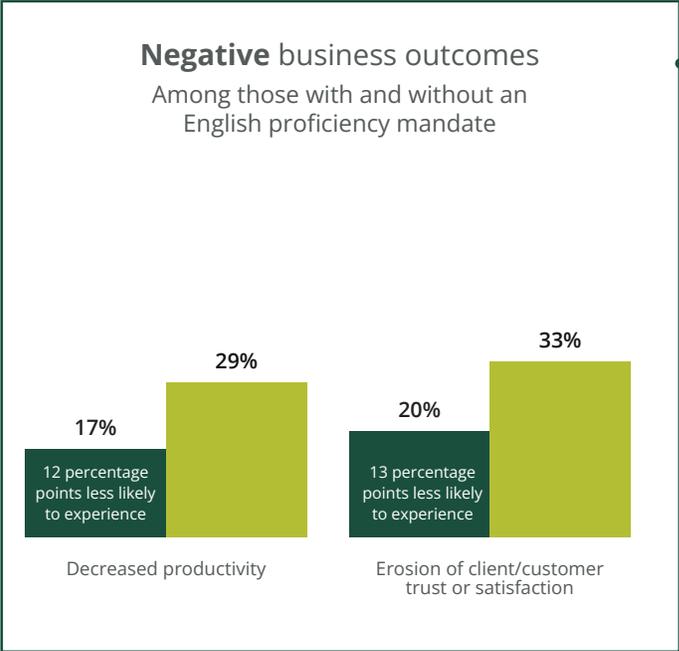
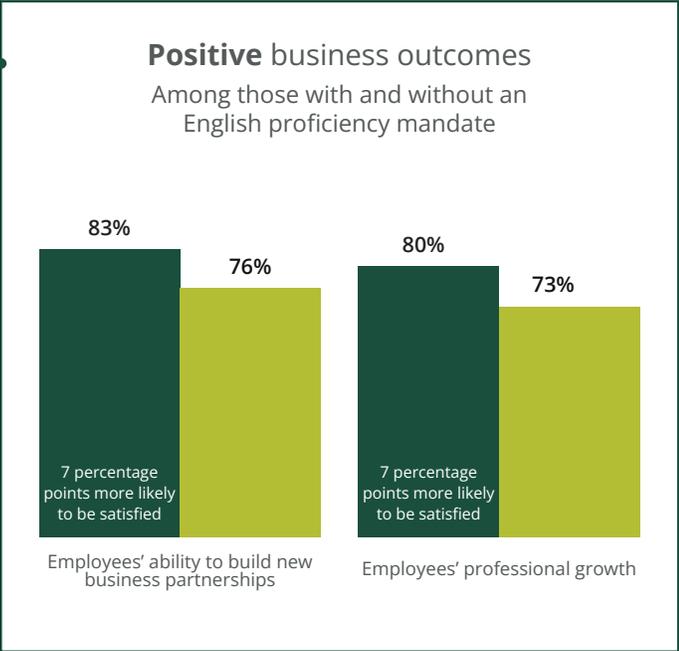
While only 23% of organizations say there are current government mandates in their region for a minimum level of English skills to complete secondary education, 53% predict policies to promote English fluency in secondary education will be implemented within 5 years.



Moreover, 79% of employers predict that within 5 years, university students will be required to pass an English language assessment to graduate and 78% envision all university graduates entering the workforce in their country will be proficient in English.

Employers in regions with English skill mandates are more likely to report positive business outcomes.

Employers in regions with English skill mandates report higher satisfaction with employees’ ability to build new business partnerships (+7 percentage points) and professional growth (+7 percentage points) compared to those in countries without mandates. They also report lower incidences of negative business outcomes: They are 13 percentage points less likely to see erosion of customer trust or satisfaction and 12 percentage points less likely to experience decreased productivity among their workforce.



*Government currently mandates a minimum level of English language proficiency to complete secondary education

Summary of key findings

The world is changing quickly — and organizations are in a race to keep up. That means fluid, efficient communication is even more critical than ever, and with it, a unifying language.

Globally, organizations overwhelmingly express a desire for greater English proficiency in their employees. Those who currently use third-party assessments see benefits across various pillars of organizational success including global collaboration, organizational growth, employee engagement and efficiency and AI tool optimization.

HR managers' needs include the ability to screen for English proficiency across job applicants — ideally, this is done during the hiring process. Candidates who are fluent in English will produce positive outcomes for organizations. Employers are also looking for English language training, development and standardized assessments to help improve proficiency among current employees to maintain a competitive edge.

Moreover, as the world moves toward a future where AI becomes ubiquitous, organizations are weighing its impact on the need for English skill assessment and development solutions. AI is not yet perceived by employers as an adequate substitute for English proficiency but it is seen as crucial for organizational growth. Employees who are able to adapt to and leverage AI tools using a strong knowledge of English will yield the most optimal outcomes for their own career success and for the success of their organization.



Appendix:

Methodology

The research was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of ETS (Educational Testing Service) from 30 September through 10 October, 2025, surveying a total of 1,325 HR decision makers, with a minimum of n=70 respondents per market. Surveyed markets include Brazil, China, France, Germany, Indonesia, India, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, UAE and Vietnam, across 17 countries. The data is weighted to ensure equal representation across the 17 countries when combined into a global total.

Respondents were selected from those who agreed to participate in online Harris Poll surveys. The sampling precision of the online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the overall combined sample data is accurate to within 2.7 percentage points.

All surveys and polls, whether they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error that are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question-wording and response options and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Contributors: The Harris Poll

