

## Research Article

# College graduates' foreign language needs in employment

Osman Dülger<sup>1</sup> and Zeynep Övdür Uğurlu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Düzce University, Faculty of Education, Türkiye (ORCID: 0000-0003-0832-5873)

<sup>2</sup>Düzce University, Hakime Erciyas School of Foreign Languages, Türkiye (ORCID: 0000-0003-1812-4629)

English, as a lingua franca, is the common language of science, education, industry, business, and many other fields, and has become a prominent research interest. In Türkiye, English is taught as a foreign language, including K12 and tertiary levels to prepare individuals for international work life. However, the English First English Proficiency Index (2023) ranks show that Türkiye is the 33rd with "low proficiency" among 34 European countries, which suggests questioning the efficiency of English language teaching, and the degree to which the needs of the graduates could be met. Therefore, this qualitative research, within a research project conducted at a Turkish state university, has been designed to obtain data from college graduate employees regarding their English needs at the workplace. Firstly, people working in the industry and commerce sectors in Düzce were asked to fill out a 16-item open-ended questionnaire, and 48 of them responded. 6 of them were interviewed to triangulate the data. The questions focused on the use of language skills and the role of English proficiency in business life. Research findings revealed that employees use their writing skills mainly to write e-mails and reports, their reading skills to read e-mails, software program messages and instructions, and their listening and speaking skills to participate and present in multinational meetings and negotiate with foreign clients. Being a proficient English user is reported to be important in employment and being promoted in work life. The study is expected to contribute to identifying the English language needs at the workplace in Türkiye and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: ELF; English; Foreign language; Needs; Work-life

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## 1. Introduction

English has become a lingua franca for many sectors and fields in many contexts. Especially the last century has witnessed an increasing dominance of the English language as a means of communication across the globe. That is why it is regarded as the language of business, science, culture and industry in this highly interconnected world. English is no longer just a language to communicate or establish cultural contact, and yet closely associated with subjects like employability, income rates, welfare, economic force, development, science and art as well. The importance devoted to English language teaching locally in countries, and the global contact among different institutions and communities together resulted in the current situation of English as a lingua franca. School education in most countries promotes learning English, either as a native tongue, foreign language, or second language.

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### Address of Corresponding Author

Osman Dülger, PhD, Düzce University, Faculty of Education, Konuralp Campus, Düzce 81620, Türkiye.

✉ [osmandulger@duzce.edu.tr](mailto:osmandulger@duzce.edu.tr)

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According to the Cambridge English Report (2016), English is spoken by 1.75 billion people, over 1 billion of which are non-native speakers. Besides, 75% of all scientific publications and 80% of indexed journals are in English (Bahji et al., 2023). In the same vein, according to the Pearson Report (2024), nearly 20% of the world's population is assumed to speak English as a first, second or additional language and many of them use it in their jobs. On the other hand, according to the same Pearson Report (2024), formal education is found to be deficient in preparing learners adequately for work life.

In Türkiye, learning English as a foreign language has been officially supported by the state organizations, primarily as a means of modernization, which, in turn, leads to the integration of the society into global institutions and values. International opportunities for business, trade, scientific collaborations, and cultural rapprochements could also be possible. Especially after World War II, foreign language education policies in Türkiye supported the learning and teaching of English as opposed to the interest in French during the previous period (Sarıçoban, 2012; Sarıçoban & Sarıçoban 2012). Following a number of education reforms, the Ministry of Education provides English language education currently from the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade at state schools, while some private schools can include more English language content in their curriculum. Tertiary education also includes various language education opportunities in addition to compulsory English language education for all. The education system can be viewed as holistically supporting individuals in developing English language skills in addition to other knowledge and skills, in line with the general aims of the national education system. On the other hand, the English First English Proficiency Index (2023) ranks illustrate that Türkiye is the 33<sup>rd</sup> with "low proficiency" among 34 European countries, which suggests questioning the efficiency of English language teaching, and the degree to which the needs of the graduates could be met. Thus, meeting the language needs of the graduate individuals may not always be possible and needs to be analyzed in terms of the actual workplace settings and employment processes as well.

## 2. Review of Literature

The current place and role of English that have developed in international contact in various fields suggest viewing English from the more recent 'lingua franca' perspective rather than limiting it to the more traditional mother tongue, foreign language, or second language understandings. Language learning and teaching can take place depending on the principles of foreign/second language teaching at schools. Yet, identifying the needs of the learners, and the future contexts the language learners will be communicating in, can contribute to the success of language teaching, too. During the last few decades, the literature has witnessed valuable studies and views on language skills, language needs and opportunities associated with learning English for employees in different contexts, in addition to relatively prevalent foreign language education research.

The history of literature on the place of English in employment dates to the 1980s as ESP research. To begin with, Dechesne's (1998) study is worth mentioning that a valuable review of literature on the usage of English at the workplace in France and some other non-native English countries was surveyed to be used as a basis for developing a higher education curriculum. The study also included data regarding student perspectives, linguistic issues and program implications, needs analysis and curriculum change reflected in the previous literature. English language usage and needs in the workplace were found to be of interest to many non-English speaking countries. Different aspects of language usage and language skills that were used often attracted the attention of researchers.

ESP (English for specific purposes), ELF (English as a lingua franca), BELF (Business English as a lingua franca), and WELF (Workplace English as a lingua franca) are among the terms that have been developed and emphasized the significance of viewing learning English from the perspective of the needs of the graduates (Chan, 2014; Jeong, 2021). The development of such terms can at the same time be regarded as a sign of the growing body of research and a need for further research on English language needs in the international market. ESP emerged as an approach to language

teaching to take the learner's reason for learning in the centre, and meet their needs better (Jeannette, 2022). Similarly, as Kim (2021) underlines, business English has become an integral subject area within academic circles as a result of the increasing number of university graduates struggling to be a part of the global workforce.

As one of the studies worth mentioning, Chan's (2014) study reveals findings regarding the concerns of Chinese professionals from different fields about their English language needs. As a written form of communication, email for both external and internal communication and reports were reported to be the most commonly used form. On the other hand, as a spoken form of communication telephoning and informal meetings/discussions were identified among the professionals' language needs. Inadequate language skills, low language proficiency and audience awareness were found to be leading challenges of writing. Colloquial words/idioms for casual conversations, proper use of words, small talk, and making presentations were recorded highest among the challenges of spoken communication expressed by professionals. The same study also reveals findings that the Business English courses taken at school did not strongly match the communication needs at the workplace. The participants of the study emphasized especially the irrelevance of the course content, overemphasis on the academic/theoretical perspective of the language, and failure to meet communicative needs in the workplace about the business English courses.

Changpueng and Pattanapichet (2015) conducted a study specifically on the needs of engineers in writing in English in the Thai context. Writing skill is highlighted as the most important skill in engineering in Thailand although the engineers need to use English to write, read, and speak with colleagues, customers, subcontractors, suppliers, and other related people. The study gathered the views of engineering students, teachers, operational engineers and managerial engineers. In their study, requests and enquiries were reported to be important in engineering. However, different groups of participants reported some slightly different views as well. Operational and managerial engineers declared that the three most important types of genres for engineering work were request e-mails, enquiry e-mails, and reports. On the other hand, ESP teachers also saw enquiry e-mails, memos, and reports as the three most important types of genres, while enquiry e-mails, reports, and minutes of meetings were the three types of genres thought to be most needed by engineering students. Overall, sociolinguistic knowledge was reported to be significant in writing requests, enquiry e-mails, and reports for appropriate communication.

Although ESP is expected to be more efficient than EFL as it reflects a more job-specific language teaching, still it can be a narrower view of preparing individuals for the workplace (Benke, 2016). A closer look at workplace English situations and the necessary language activities to be included in language teaching curricula in higher education should constitute the basis for equipping the learners with the necessary English language skills for work-related contexts. Benke (2016) surveyed the business, hospitality, and finance employees in Hungary and investigated the most common foreign language activities and the topics the employees were mostly busy with. E-mail exchange was reported to be the most frequent way of communication by the respondents, requiring reading and writing skills. Still, writing activities were less often than reading. Paper-based letters and reports followed email interaction. Both formal and informal spoken interaction was also popular at workplaces that work-related conversation with foreign partners on business trips, and informal conversation with foreign partners on business trips were the most frequently applied activities in the foreign language.

Hiranburana (2017) investigated the use of English in the Thai workplace focusing on the media types of communication in the workplace, and types of problems in Thai business communication, in an attempt to develop suggestions for English course materials design for business. E-mail is reported to be the most used (94.4%) medium followed by telephone (80.6%), and fax (48.6%). Memos (66.7%) are the most used types of communication in English, followed by meetings (65.3%), and written reports (63.9%), while staff kept minutes at meetings and gave oral presentations in English. In terms of the frequency of communicative activities in English, the

study reports that e-mail (97.3%) is the most used by businesspeople which is followed by reading and writing memos (83.8%), presenting facts and figures (52.8%), making proposals (52.8%), and conducting phone calls (51.4%), as well as oral presentations (51.4%).

Clement and Murugavel's (2018) study presents findings about English language usage mainly of Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services [ITES] employees. The respondents believed speaking is the most important language skill while listening, writing and reading followed. The employees shared the belief that they need English language skills to get a job especially to communicate at work through emails, group discussions, and presentations.

In a similar study, Kim (2021) investigated the usage and needs of spoken and written communication skills of Korean employees, and the findings indicated that email was the most frequently used written genre by the employees, followed by meeting materials, business reports and messengers. Finance sector employees were found to prefer messengers more than manufacturing sector employees because the finance sector workers had to update themselves in the real-time financial market and communicate. In accordance with the previous research findings, needs analysis was found necessary to understand what communication skills the employees need during work-related tasks.

Glomo-Narzoles and Glomo-Palermo (2021) conducted a study on workplace English language needs and the effectiveness of English courses or ESP taken. The study reveals significant results to be used as pedagogical implications, with a view that needs analysis is crucial for any ESP training course. The study gathered data from expatriate employees in multinational companies. Speaking was found to be the most often used skill in the workplace, followed by listening, writing, and reading. The study also presents valuable findings about problems with each of the four language skills. About the problems encountered by the employees, unfamiliarity with accents and pronunciation; inability to understand slang, idiomatic expressions or colloquialisms; and inability to remember the entire information were the leading 3 listening problems. The inability to speak with correct grammar and structure; lack of confidence when speaking; and inability to pronounce accurately were the leading speaking problems for them. The inability to understand due to grammatical weakness; inability to understand words, technical terms, slang, and idiomatic expressions; and inadequacy of vocabulary in reading constituted the three main problems of reading. As for writing, the inability to use correct grammar and structure; errors in spelling, punctuation, and other technicalities; and difficulty in writing messages according to intention were reported as the most problematic parts.

Similarly, Jeannette (2022) conducted needs analysis research with Benin banking, tourism and travel professionals on their needs for English in their specific area of work. Banking, travel and tourism employees reported that they needed to develop their listening skills to communicate effectively with their customers, specifically, they wanted to develop vocabulary appropriate to their field of work. The use of Communicative Language Teaching in ESP at different levels of training, and assessment of all four language skills are among the suggestions to be regarded in future research.

Çal et al. (2022) investigated the workplace English usage of engineers in Türkiye. The study reveals findings that English has a major role in employment and career advancement, and is not limited to daily communication. Reading is reported to be the most important skill while speaking is to be the least important one. Reading manuals and instructions was the most frequently reported communicative task, followed by listening to presentations and meetings, writing presentation slides, emails, and reports, and for speaking, teleconferencing and videoconferencing received the highest frequency as communicative tasks.

In a comprehensive research study conducted by Pearson, a large number of speakers of English as a second or additional language from different industries, career levels and age groups shared their opinions about the role of English in the workplace. 80% of the respondents in the Pearson Report (2024) believed that English ability is important in determining how much an employee can earn, and 51% expressed that they were learning English to have access to job roles

that pay more. To be more specific, 51% declared “enabling to access a wider range of job roles” as a professional motivator for learning English, 50% “enabling to access jobs that are paid more”, and 40% “enabling to advance to more senior positions within my current field of work”. 56% of the participants believed that English proficiency could help earning 50% more. The Pearson Report (2024) suggests a clear correlation between the level of English proficiency and job satisfaction. To be precise, 88% of employees with advanced, 82% of intermediate, 75% of moderate, and 64% of elementary level English proficiency were satisfied with their jobs. 40% of the employees declared that they use English daily, which rose to 70% in some countries, and better English skills were associated with more confidence both in professional and personal life. Reading, writing, listening and speaking skills were all found to be essential at work, however, the employees declared the least confidence in writing and speaking. 69% of advanced employees declared confidence in all four skills, while 31% of intermediate levels, 10% of moderate levels, and 3% of elementary levels could declare confidence. In terms of each language skill, the employees declared 62% confidence in reading, 57% in listening, and 48% in writing and listening.

Consequently, the relevant literature signals the need to investigate the English language needs of graduates in the workplace. Certainly, the amount of research on English language needs and levels is not limited, however, as reminded by Benke (2016), there is always a need to keep up with the requirements of contemporary developments in the 21st Century. In a century during which change is inevitable, there is a reformation in the perception of English and an expansion in its use. The literature suggests a conceptual transition from EFL English as a Foreign Language to ELF/BELF contexts regarding the language taught at schools and the actual use of English at the workplace (Altınmakas et al., 2019). Jeong (2021) also discusses the language of the international workplace, with brief analyses of English as Lingua Franca [ELF], Business English as Lingua Franca [BELF], Workplace English as a Lingua Franca [WELF] in view of different models and concludes with a suggestion that WELF would be a significant part of language teaching pedagogy in a globalized world. However, such a shift in pedagogy naturally requires a linguistic analysis of the workplace language usage and needs.

Contrary to what is needed, today many English as a foreign language [EFL] schools are known to rely heavily on coursebooks for their syllabuses or course planning (Jeannette, 2022). A target-driven curriculum development process requires effective needs analysis and obtaining data from the field. Only then, meaningful and functional content and methodology can be on the stage to serve the needs of the individuals in real-life contexts. Thus, our study has been designed as a preliminary step to start a broader English language curriculum development process, to meet the English language needs of the future graduate (currently undergraduate) students in Türkiye. As anticipated from the findings of various studies, content and materials production can also benefit from such a curriculum development process to meet the needs of the employees at the workplace.

Given these concerns, specifically in Türkiye, it becomes essential to explore the specific foreign language competencies required in professional settings and to assess how higher education prepares graduates for these demands. The gap between the language proficiency levels reported in national and international assessments and the expectations of the job market raises critical questions about the effectiveness of foreign language education at the tertiary level. Employers increasingly seek candidates who can navigate globalized business environments, communicate effectively with international clients, and handle job-related terminology with ease. However, if higher education fails to equip graduates with the necessary linguistic and communicative skills, they may face challenges in securing competitive job opportunities or advancing in their careers. Therefore, understanding both the language needs of professionals and the perceptions of graduates regarding their language education is crucial for identifying potential mismatches and areas for improvement. To address this issue, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ 1) What kind of foreign language skills do college-graduate staff and directors employed in private sector organizations need in their professional lives?

RQ 2) What are college-graduate employees' opinions about the foreign language instruction they receive in higher education?

Investigating the foreign language skills required in professional settings and how college graduates perceive their language education can provide valuable insights for applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Understanding the alignment between academic instruction and workplace communication may contribute to research in English for Specific Purposes [ESP] by identifying key communicative competencies across sectors and refining existing ESP models. Additionally, this study aims at helping expand language proficiency conceptualizations by emphasizing pragmatic competence, job-related discourse, and intercultural communication skills. Beyond theoretical implications, the findings are expected to support workplace-relevant language training curricula. Ultimately, research into workplace-relevant language needs can serve as a foundation for improving language education practices, enhancing workforce readiness, and promoting more effective communication in professional contexts. The following section of the study presents the methodology of this research.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This research was designed as part of a larger scale Scientific Research Project conducted at Düzce University, Türkiye. This phase of the study employed a qualitative approach to explore the opinions of employees working in institutions registered to the Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Düzce Chamber of Merchants and Craftsmen, about their foreign language (English) needs by identifying their profiles regarding their roles, education and their usage of the English language at workplace. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to capturing rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, which are crucial for understanding complex social phenomena (Creswell, 2007). In this study, data were collected using two primary methods: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, both of which allowed participants to express their thoughts freely, offering detailed and nuanced responses (Patton, 2015). An open-ended questionnaire was employed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted in data collection.

Qualitative data collection procedures are mixed for triangulation, complementarity and expansion purposes (Greene et al., 1989). When methods are complementary, they serve to validate, refine, or extend the findings. Expansion can be accepted as a key reason for using different data collection tools. In this study, data were collected by using different tools and at different times, which made data triangulation available. The answers in this study's questionnaire and the more detailed explanations in the interviews enriched the interpretation of the findings, enabling researchers to see both the "big picture" and the underlying mechanisms. The interviews were conducted for expansion, and this allowed the research to move towards new directions, uncovering additional variables or insights.

#### 3.2. Participants

The participants in this study were selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is one of the non-probability sampling methods which involves recruiting individuals who are easily accessible and willing to participate (Emerson, 2021). This method was preferred due to its practicality and efficiency in reaching participants within the constraints of time and resources. The researchers got into contact with the companies registered to the Düzce Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Düzce Chamber of Merchants and Craftsmen. A total of 48 participants were available, and 8 of them volunteered to be interviewed. Although the convenience sampling method may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population, it was deemed appropriate for exploratory research aimed at gathering initial insights into exploring the language needs of the college-graduate employees (Bornstein et al., 2013). Within the scope of this research, the term "college-graduate" was considered to be a suitable

phrase for the people who completed a two-year or four-year study at the university level. Participants were provided with information about the study and gave their informed consent prior to participation. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without consequence. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the research process. Participants were coded as P1, P2,....P48 during data analysis and presenting the findings.

In the questionnaire participants were asked to give information about their current positions at their workplaces, jobs, degrees, and work experience. Their answers revealed that the participants were from different sectors, at different positions, and with different levels of work experience. They reported their current positions as 5 Managers, 5 Accounting supervisors, 4 Human resources specialists, 4 Teachers, 3 Planning engineers, 3 Specialists, 2 Software developers, 1 Assistant validation specialist, 1 Structural analysis engineer, 1 Founder, 1 Production planning manager, 1 Psychologist, 1 Brand consultant, 1 Assistant Director, 1 Lawyer, 1 Receptionist, 1 Product development engineer, 1 Business development and product manager, and 9 of them did not specify about their current positions. The participants reported their jobs as 10 engineers, 5 accountants, 4 teachers, 3 human resources specialists, 2 Software specialists, 2 Architects, 2 Chemists, 1 Orthosis prosthesis specialist, 1 Manufacturer, 1 Quality system specialist, 1 Psychologist, 1 Graphic designer, 1 Occupational safety specialist, 1 Insurer, 1 Lawyer, 1 Business development specialist, 1 Textile technology specialist, 1 Art historian, 1 Biologist, 1 Sales specialist while 7 of them did not specify about their jobs.

The participants' answers about their educational degrees and work experience showed that 31 held a bachelor's degree, 8 had an associate degree, 7 had a postgraduate degree and 2 did not specify their degrees. 20 of them declared 1-5 years of work experience, 13 of them 5-10 years, 13 more than 10 years of work experience, and 2 participants preferred not to specify their job experience. Findings from our study about the employees' current positions, jobs, educational degrees, and work experience illustrated a variety of positive support for the validity of the findings of the research regarding the place of the English language at the workplace, as well as reflecting some realities of work-life about the compatibility of jobs and the positions people work at.

### 3.3. Data Collection

In qualitative research, piloting may not be considered mandatory but useful when compared to quantitative research where measurement tools should be proven statistically sound for valid, reliable and generalizable findings. The main goal of piloting qualitative research is to refine the research instruments (e.g., interview questions, observation protocols) and methods. It helps to test the clarity of questions, the relevance of the themes, and the effectiveness of the data collection process (Maxwell, 2013). Although piloting is a valuable step that can improve the quality, reliability, and feasibility of qualitative research, the decision to conduct a pilot depends on factors like study design and resources. Hence, Sampson (2004) suggests that when time, funding, or access to participants is constrained, researchers may not have the opportunity to conduct a pilot. In such cases, the first few interviews may inform subsequent data collection without being labelled a formal pilot. Creswell and Poth (2017) also recommend that initial interviews can be viewed as an opportunity to explore and assess the effectiveness of the interview questions or data collection methods, enabling researchers to make adjustments as needed. Therefore, in this study, firstly asking the open-ended questions in written form and then directing the same questions in the interviews helped the researchers evaluate the richness of the data. The first two interviews were conducted and then checked for clarity. During the interviews, participants were asked to elaborately explain the answers they submitted in the online form, which was considered as member checking (Creswell, 2012) and provided triangulation resulting in more accurate and credible findings.

### 3.4. Open-ended Questionnaire

An open-ended online questionnaire was distributed to participants as the initial data collection tool. Open-ended questions enable participants to respond in their own words, providing insights into their perspectives without being constrained by predefined response options (Dörnyei, 2007). The questionnaire included two main parts, the first of which was to gather profile information. The participants gave information about their jobs, degrees, experience, and some contact information such as their mobile phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and company names. Contact information was requested from volunteers to participate in interviews. In the second part, 17 questions focused on the foreign language needs of the participants, designed to elicit comprehensive responses regarding the language skills needed in professional life and foreign language learning experiences of people with college-degrees. This method provided preliminary data that informed the subsequent semi-structured interviews.

### 3.5. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the complementary data collection method to the questionnaire. This approach allowed for flexibility in the interview process, enabling the researcher to probe for further details while maintaining a consistent framework across interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The questionnaire was used as an interview guide ensuring that language needs and skills were addressed while allowing participants the freedom to introduce additional insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews lasted between 45-55 minutes and were conducted in person.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

After the recruitment of online questionnaires, answers were downloaded in two forms: individual answers and answers in thematic forms. Following the face-to-face semi-structured interviews, the records were transcribed, and the irrelevant data were deleted. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from both questionnaires and interviews. Following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2016), the analysis involved six steps: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. In this study, thematic analysis was chosen for its adaptability and effectiveness in uncovering patterns within detailed qualitative data. Once the gist of the data was obtained, the codes were classified and grouped within the themes.

### 3.7. Limitations of the Study

The findings of this qualitative study are limited to the data collected through the interviews and forms implemented in a relatively small-scale research project. Employing the convenience sampling method enabled researchers to reach a limited number of participants available, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the conclusions drawn out of this research will be limited to a more specific Turkish context.

## 4. Findings

This section of the study presents the data obtained from the participants through the questionnaire and interviews with a discussion of these findings. In addition to the participants' profile information, findings regarding the first research question, and the second research question are presented, and they are compared and contrasted with the findings in the relevant literature. In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to answer questions about their profiles. The questions were formed to learn about participants' current positions in their workplace, jobs, degrees, and work experience. Although contact information is not presented in this paper because of participant privacy, it is also obtained for the next step of the research as volunteers were asked to participate in face-to-face interviews.



#### 4.1. Findings regarding the First Research Question

The first research question “What kind of foreign language skills do college-graduate staff and directors employed in private sector organizations need in their professional lives?” was formed to collect data about the foreign language needs of people with university-degrees who work in the private sector. Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 15, and 16 were included in the questionnaire to find an answer to the first research question. In the semi-structured interviews participants were asked to make detailed and broader explanations by following their answers in the questionnaire.

##### 4.1.1. Findings regarding the usage of English at workplace

The first question in the questionnaire and interview was formed as “Do you ever need to communicate in a foreign language (English) at your workplace? If yes, please specify whether it is written or spoken?”. The purpose is to determine the foreign language needs of college-degree staff in their workplace. The participants' answers to the first question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

##### *The usage of English at the workplace*

<i>The Usage of English at the Workplace</i>	<i>Number of Participants (#)</i>	<i>Percentage of Participants (%)</i>	<i>Common Usage Areas</i>
Both written and spoken	23	48	*Technical documents *Preparing or filling out forms
Only written	7	15	*Domain-specific programs and program warnings
Only spoken	6	12	*Writing e-mail messages or using other texting tools
No usage	12	25	*Attending fairs *Product promotion *Daily conversations with clients *Interdepartmental correspondence *Making reports *Reviewing related literature

As shown in Table 1, the most frequent answer with 48% is that participants needed both written and spoken communication in English. While 15% of the participants expressed that they needed only written communication, the rest 12% pointed out that they needed to communicate orally. 25% of the participants stated that they did not need to communicate in English in their professional lives. The participants reported some common usages of English at the workplace as reading technical documents, preparing and filling out forms, while using domain-specific software programs, reading software program warnings, writing e-mail messages, texting using various applications, conducting interdepartmental correspondence, reviewing related literature and reading scientific papers. Some of the quotations from participants' direct statements in the interviews are shared below to highlight some points:

For example, we need to work in the field of chemistry with chemical engineers, and since we are a company which focuses its work on foreign countries, we write a lot of emails. (P6)

In order to read the error message, how can I say, it is an error message consisting of approximately 15-16 lines. To understand this error message, I need to read it, I need to be able to understand it. (P3)

Since we have a research and development center, scientific articles are of course used a lot, in this sense, we always revise literature of our field, academically, we also have that side. (P6)

Regarding spoken communication, participants stated they needed English for attending fairs, product promotion and having daily conversations with clients. Some statements of participants about oral communication needs are shared below:

At fairs, I use foreign languages more with sales representatives of foreign companies and foreign brands, especially for Chinese origin products. When I talk about the machine or want to have information, I need English more in those situations. (P4)

Clients visit us, we attend fairs abroad, we sometimes visit our clients abroad. It is not only about work; we also need to talk about some daily issues. (P6)

The communicative needs expressed by the participants of our study signal that in our sample, 75% of the employees used English for communicative purposes; however, 25% of them did not need to communicate in English at work. A preliminary analysis of the findings suggests that depending on the sectors, the distribution of the tasks and roles in a company, current responsibilities and positions can make it possible that even in an export trading company everyone might not need to communicate in English. As our questionnaire on English usage did not question why or why not the respondents used English or not, the interviews provided a deeper understanding of the communicative needs of the participants because it could be possible to observe that staff of the companies with foreign cooperations and trading needed to communicate more in English. On the other hand, employees of companies with a relatively local focus in business, and the position of the staff in the organization are likely to signal a limited use of English.

#### 4.1.2. Findings regarding current usage of language skills at the workplace

The questionnaire includes four questions (Questions 2, 3, 4, 5) to capture participants' opinions about what language skills they use in their workplace. The questions are about writing, reading, speaking and listening skills separately. The second question was formulated as "In what situations do you use your writing skills and what kind of texts do you write at your workplace?" The distribution of the answers is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Writing skills at the workplace*

<i>Writing Skills - Texts</i>	#	%
E-mails	12	25
Reports and documents	6	12
Formal correspondence	4	8
Billing	3	6
Scientific papers	2	4
Taking notes for daily conversations	1	2
No use	6	12

As seen in Table 2, most of the participants (25%) use their English to write e-mails, followed by 12% to write reports and documents about the procedures at work and 12% of the participants stated that they never used English to write anything at work as they did not need it. 8% of the participants used their writing skills to conduct correspondence at the departmental level or with foreign companies. "Billing" is the next frequent answer with 6% and participants pointed out that they needed to form bills during purchase-and-sale. Another answer with 4% is writing scientific papers and participants mentioned their use of English writing skills to write their research reports and publish them in scientific journals, which was included in the work of their companies' research and development centers. Finally, 2% of the participants stated that they took notes before participating in a daily conversation, which helped them get ready to talk. Additionally, there are 4 participants who mentioned their weak writing skills by explaining that they could not write anything or produce any written product as they did not improve their writing skills in English much or they were not proficient enough to write anything in English in their professional lives. Some participants' statements about the use of writing skills in the workplace are quoted below:

When we prepare analysis reports for our clients abroad, we must write them in English as English is the lingua franca. Analysis reports are scientific, and we need to write accurately, being careful

with grammatical rules; that's why it is important to know English grammar. All technical reports have their rules, grammar is important in that sense. (P3)

When we need to write reports of the analyses, we write them in English. All interdepartmental correspondence is conducted in English. (P6)

The third question is about reading skills needed at the workplace and is formed as *"What kind of reading texts do you read and try to understand at work?"*. The answers mostly cumulated as documentation, e-mails and reports; however, some answers were mainly about the use of English for personal needs such as academic readings and following news, social media, and blogs. Participants' opinions about the use of reading skills at the workplace are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Reading skills at the workplace*

<i>Reading Skills - Texts</i>	#	%
Documents or books about the profession	14	33
Scientific papers	8	19
Formal correspondence (e-mails, reports)	4	9
Social media, news, blogs, websites	4	9
Reports	2	5
Billing	1	3
No use	4	9

As shown in Table 3, 33% of the participants read some documents and books to obtain information about their field of work, which helps them follow the technological improvements and innovations in their profession. This is followed by reading scientific research reports and papers (19%), conducting formal correspondence in English (9%), websites, news (9%), reports (5%), and bills (3%) respectively. On the other hand, 9% of the participants stated that they did not need to use their reading skills at workplace. Some participants' statements are shared below:

I am interested in scientific journals; I search for new publications worldwide. I try to learn about innovations in our field. I read the papers, take notes and consider doing the things I learn from these papers in Türkiye. (P5)

I always read documents about informatics and see a lot of new words. When I know the key words, it is easier to understand. (P1)

Findings regarding reading skills suggest a high degree of consistency with the usage of writing skills and the written language activities performed at the workplace. Reading skills were also found to be the most significant for nearly half of the employers, although varying according to the sectors or countries, according to the Cambridge English Report (2016). Participants of our study declared interest in reading mostly job-related professional materials and documents in English.

The fourth question is about speaking skills and is formulated as *"In what situations and topics do you need to use your speaking skills?"*. The answers to this question are mainly about participating in interactions in multinational contexts and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Speaking skills at the workplace*

<i>Speaking Skills</i>	#	%
Client visits	14	35
Job interviews	4	10
Meetings	2	5
Exhibitions	1	3
Product promotion	1	3
International calls	1	3
No	6	15

As presented in Table 4, 35% of the participants stated that they needed to speak English when they visited their clients abroad or when they welcomed them to their companies. In the interviews, they mentioned that they had difficulties while they were trying to explain what they had on their minds. Sometimes they could not find the correct words or spent some time and effort to find the correct grammar structures, which resulted in more frequent pauses in their speech. They felt more comfortable while they were giving presentations as they got prepared in advance and they found this less risky. Some participants' statements are shared below to clarify that point:

At work, we frequently need to speak in English, both professionally and daily. Speaking is a kind of reflection which shows your actual proficiency level. If you can speak English well, then you know English at a certain level. In meetings, while we are making presentations to promote our products or to give information about our work to our customers. This is not very hard. But sometimes when we welcome our clients in our company or during small talks in exhibitions and meetings, we need to talk about daily issues such as weather, food, news. (P6)

In international fairs, I sometimes want to get information about the machines. I ask for information, comment on the product, come up with further details. We sometimes do this through text messages, but sometimes we participate in oral interactions. (P4)

Totally, 59% of our participants declared that they use English-speaking skills, primarily for occupational purposes. However, they expressed their concerns and confidence about speaking, while explaining the contexts they need to speak, too. The interviews suggest clues that speaking is not limited to formal or technical issues but socializing, or informal small talks can also be among the needs of the employees. The ability to speak in English is also identified as an indicator of proficiency in English by the interviewee (P6).

The fifth and last question about language skills is about listening skills, formulated as "*In what situations do you benefit from your English listening skills?*". The answers mostly cumulated in the daily use of English as watching series, movies and videos rather than using it professionally. However, some participants mentioned that in pieces of training, exhibitions, and meetings they needed to use their listening skills. Answers to the fifth question are presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
*Listening skills at the workplace*

<i>Listening Skills</i>	#	%
Watching movies, series and videos (daily use of English)	13	36
Meetings and teleconferencing	4	11
Trainings (by foreign trainers)	2	6
Purchasing process	2	6
Exhibitions	1	3
Inspections (by foreign bodies)	1	3

As summarized in Table 5, participants thought that they used their listening skills in English mostly for daily needs such as watching videos, series, and movies in English as they believe that this helps them to improve their English skills. For professional purposes, participants needed to use their listening skills when they attended seminars given by foreign trainers, in meetings or teleconferences with foreign customers, and in exhibitions. They also stated that they needed listening skills during the purchasing process as they were given presentations about the products. Some explanations of the participants are presented below:

I always watch videos in English. Once I attended a webinar, I did not understand most of the things the presenter said. I guess she was Spanish, and she had an accent. We need to improve our English skills in such a way that we can understand different accents and people. (P2)

65% of the participants in our study seem to declare specific interest in and use of English listening skills. One interesting finding after the interviews was that although 36% reported their listening activities as "Watching movies, series and videos (daily use of English)", such listening activities were performed to improve their listening skills to be able to understand people during

communication, e.g. presentations (P2). The next part of the study includes the challenges of communicating in English pointed out by the participants.

#### 4.1.3. Findings regarding the challenges

After participants' opinions about the use of four language skills are captured, question 6 "State the most important problem you encounter when communicating in a foreign language-English." was composed to learn about the challenges participants experience regarding their foreign language skills. Answers did not vary much as most of the participants mentioned the difficulties and challenges they face during oral communication. Table 6 shows the summary of the answers to the sixth question.

Table 6

#### Challenges - communicating in English

Challenges	#	%
Speaking	24	80
Listening	7	23
Reading	2	7
No challenges	3	8

As seen in Table 6, the majority of the participants (80%) mentioned challenges when they tried to speak in English. They stated that they could not speak accurately and fluently, and needed to think about the grammar rules and the correct words to use. Additionally, some of them emphasized that they always had to consider grammatical expressions, which prevented them from speaking fluently. When they do not know a lot about the jargon of their field, they do not understand what they read properly. Here are some of the statements about the challenges they encounter:

I never understand French people speaking English. They have a weird accent. I have to listen to them very attentively or else I do not understand a single word as it is also noisy around in meetings and fairs. (P5)

It is very challenging for me to start a conversation. When somebody asks me a question, the very first words never appear in my mind and it takes me a few seconds to give a reply. Sometimes I do not find the exact words, sometimes I cannot decide which tense to use in my sentences. Sometimes I'm confused about the word order. (P6)

The participants did not identify grammar as a challenge in the questionnaire; however, during the interviews, adhering to grammar rules was cited as an obstacle to effective communication. In addition, issues related to accents, vocabulary, and genres were also reported as challenges. These findings suggest that while grammar was not initially highlighted, it nonetheless played a significant role in hindering communication, alongside other linguistic difficulties such as accent comprehension and vocabulary use.

Following the challenges employees encounter while they are trying to communicate in English, participants were asked about their needs for language training by including question 11 "Did you ever need foreign language training after starting your career? If your answer is yes, what subjects did you want to receive training on (improving speaking skills, improving writing skills, etc.)?" in the questionnaire. The predominant opinion was "The participants needed to receive training to improve their speaking skills". This answer was followed by "They needed to improve reading, writing, listening, presentation skills and vocabulary knowledge", respectively. A minority of the participants stated that they did not feel the need to receive any training to improve their language skills. The answers to the eleventh question are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

*The need for language training*

<i>The Need for Training</i>	#	%
Yes – for speaking	18	41
Yes – for both speaking and writing	4	9
Yes – for presentation skills	2	5
Yes – for both reading and writing	1	2
Yes – for vocabulary	1	3
No	9	20

The data presented in Table 7 reveals that employees need to improve mostly their speaking skills. Most participants indicated that they needed to make presentations, communicate with clients, and attend international fairs. They felt the real need to learn English after they started to work and realized that they were not very good at speaking English. The participants who did not want to receive language training mentioned that they did not demand any training as using English is not a requirement for their work. Among the participants who did not feel the need to receive any language training for their profession, one stated that:

I never wanted to take any language courses after I started to work here. I need to use English in my job, but I use only written language. If my job required me to speak English, definitely, I would need to receive training to improve my speaking skills. (P1)

Regarding the need for extra in-service language training support, we could observe that most of the companies required and assessed the English proficiency level of their employees during the hiring process. If the position the candidate would be recruited required language proficiency, the responsible departments had their own testing and job interview processes in English. Participant 6 explains this in their following words:

Our company has an agreement with a language test center. This center employs language tests for our candidates. We also make job interviews in English. (P6)

#### 4.1.4. Findings regarding the role of English at the workplace

The following question provides findings about the function of English during recruitment, and promotion stages. Question 15 “Do you think knowing a foreign language is effective in recruitment or promotion?” was formulated to capture participants’ opinions about the role of being a proficient user of English in employment processes. Participants’ answers indicated that knowing English is important in both being hired for a job and being promoted to a higher status in the workplace. Table 8 highlights the distribution of participants’ answers to question 15.

Table 8

*The role of English at the workplace*

<i>The Role of English at the Workplace</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Recruitment	21	48
Promotion	19	43
Both	14	32

Related to question 15, participants were asked to share their experiences in employment or promotion processes in question 16 “Would you like to share with us an experience (if any) related to your answer to the previous question?”. Some participants stated that one of the requirements of their employment in their current position was to be a proficient English user. Companies do not only accept language certificates or test scores, but they also conduct job interviews in English to test their English proficiency. The quotation shared below is an example of this:

To be employed in our company, you need to show your performance. We have an agreement with a language test center and they give an exam for the candidates. This exam includes testing of four language skills separately, including grammar and vocabulary. (P6)

The statements of P6 show that companies look for employees who are efficient users of English. This is also approved by another participant who specified the importance of knowing English to work at a higher or administrative status in their company. She stated that:

If you want to get promoted or work at an administrative position, knowing English and communicating well in English are a must. Sometimes, the human resources department does not care about your educational background or work experience, your proficiency in English can help you to be promoted to a higher position. (P6)

Participant 1 explains this issue as follows:

A manager, a person in one of the top positions, represents his company in meetings, and international fairs. We get into contact with Indians or Europeans, and English is the common language. To make the best of his responsibility and position, he needs to speak English fluently and accurately. That's why, to be promoted to managerial level, one needs to have a strong command of English. (P1)

Findings regarding the role of the English language in employment illustrate some privileges for the employees. 48% of our participants declared that English is effective just at the beginning of recruitment, and 43% of them thought that English is effective in promotion. There are 32% of the participants who stated that English plays an important role in both promotion and recruitment. Better job opportunities and chances to be promoted are among the functions and effects of English proficiency at the workplace.

Findings regarding the first research question of the study about the English language needs of the graduate staff in Düzce city industry and commerce sectors highlighted some important points about English language needs of college-graduate employees. To be precise, the participants attributed importance to English language proficiency and the use of language skills for various tasks and functions. Although reading and writing emails and reports were among the leading language activities, speaking and listening were also declared as necessary language skills both for formal and informal purposes. The companies hired staff holding English proficiency, through certain assessment processes depending on the job requirements and position. Thus, paying attention to English proficiency at the start of the work life is thought to decrease the problems with language needs to be encountered in the future. On the other hand, the English language was found to be effective both in recruitment and promotion. The next part of the study presents findings and discussion regarding the second research question of our study.

#### 4.2. Findings regarding the Second Research Question

The second research question "What are college-graduate employees' opinions about the foreign language instruction they receive in higher education?" was formulated to collect data about the foreign language learning experiences of people with college-degrees who work in the private sector. Questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 were included in the questionnaire to find an answer to the second research question. In the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to make detailed and comprehensive explanations by revising their answers in the questionnaire.

In question 7, participants were given a list of common themes and topics suggested in CEFR to be used in English course programs at K-12 and tertiary levels. These themes are *introducing oneself/greetings, people (family, relatives, friends), days (routines, special days, celebrations), job and education (career, professions), places (residence, city, address), fun, travel and transportation, food and drinks, shopping, sports and exercise, health, life (memories, experiences, plans), communication, hobbies and leisure activities, and art*. Then, they were asked to explain whether these themes were sufficient to achieve English goals, or they would suggest any new themes or topics to the list. The question was formulated as "The following topics/themes are frequently used in English curricula. Do you think these topics/themes are suitable? Apart from these topics/themes, what topics or themes do you think would be useful to do language studies on? Can you share your suggestions?". The majority of the participants (64 %) found the themes suitable, and the others believed that those themes were not sufficient to teach English effectively. Both groups made some suggestions and added some global themes to

the list as problem-solving, empathy, science, technology, business, technical terminology, and popular culture, in addition to a local theme as Atatürk's principles and reforms.

Subsequent to the themes, questions 8 and 9 were included to obtain participants' opinions about the other elements of the English course content. Question 8 was formed as "Do you think that the foreign language (English) instruction provided in schools in Türkiye is satisfactory to provide you with the language skills, structures and patterns you need? Why?". Nearly none of the students found English instruction satisfactory and made explanations about the issue. Table 10 presents data obtained from participants' opinions about question 8.

Table 10

*The satisfaction with English instruction*

<i>The Satisfaction with the English Instruction</i>	#	%
No	40	95
Yes	2	5

Participants who did not believe that English instruction in schools of Türkiye was sufficient, clarified their opinions from various perspectives. Some of them mentioned that language teaching is based on memorization of grammar rules and words. They believed that there is not enough emphasis on practice and improvement of language skills. Repetitive course content was thought to demotivate students and courses were found to be not interesting and fun enough.

In question 9, participants were asked to make suggestions for skills, structures and patterns in language classes (*What skills, structures or patterns do you think should be included or excluded from foreign language (English) teaching curricula?*). Most of the participants focused on the improvement of speaking skills and practice rather than grammar and memorization. Some suggested that using songs, some fun games, role-plays, and conversations might be helpful in more meaningful learning. Some suggestions are as follows:

I don't think there is anything to be excluded, but I think we should not give such a big importance to teaching grammar. It is more important to be able to explain your problem rather than using the rules here and there in daily English. I believe cliches about grammar should be reconsidered. (P3)

If we practice more in English courses, we can speak English well when we start to work after graduation. We can speak better, and we will be more confident in presentations, meetings and fairs. (P6)

Finally, question 10 was formulated as "What are your expectations from foreign language (English) instruction provided in higher education?". Similarly, most participants put emphasis on the importance of speaking skills and practice. Some of them added an academic perspective and suggested that it was important to add academic skills such as summarizing, inferencing, reading academic papers, reviewing literature and learning the jargon of their field. For example, according to participant 3, the English course at the tertiary level should be organized in such a way that students can get well-prepared to use English in their future professional lives:

A student studies engineering or studies in a vocational college. In his professional life, for example, he will want to get a hammer from his co-workers. Firstly, he needs to know the English equivalent of the gadget he wants to borrow, he needs to know what to say when people want to borrow something. If he practices this during his college education, he can do it in real life, too. (P3)

Data obtained from the graduate employees indicated that 64% of the participants agreed that common themes presented in English classes (and mostly in course books) can be acceptable, but 95% were not satisfied with the English instruction at schools in Türkiye. Problem-solving, empathy, science, technology, business, technical terminology, and popular culture were among the themes suggested by our participants to take place in English language courses. Summarizing, inferencing, reading academic papers, reviewing literature and learning the jargon of their field were noted among the skills to be included in language classes.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the perspectives of college-graduate employees regarding the foreign language (English) instruction they received in



higher education. While the majority of participants considered the common themes presented in English curricula to be suitable, there was a clear consensus that the instruction they received in schools in Türkiye was insufficient for equipping them with the necessary language skills. Issues such as an overemphasis on grammar and memorization, lack of practical language use, and repetitive course content were highlighted as factors contributing to dissatisfaction. Participants emphasized the importance of enhancing speaking skills through interactive methods such as role-plays, conversations, and games. Additionally, there was a notable call for the inclusion of academic skills, such as summarizing, inferencing, and learning field-specific jargon, in higher education English programs. The suggestions put forward by the participants—ranging from global themes like science and technology to practical applications for professional life—underscore the need for a more dynamic and contextually relevant approach to English language teaching. These findings can inform the development of future curricula that better align with the needs and expectations of learners, ensuring that foreign language instruction prepares students for both personal and professional communication.

## 5. Discussion

As mentioned earlier in the introduction part of this paper, this study investigated English language needs of college-graduate employees from two perspectives. Firstly, the usage of English at the workplace from a general point of view was sought for, and following this, the need for four language skills was asked about separately. Challenges in communicating in English, the need for language training, and the role of English at the workplace were the other subtitles participants' opinions were categorized. Secondly, the participants were asked to share their opinions about their experiences while learning English in college and they explained how satisfactory English instruction they received was.

The findings regarding the first research question indicate that nearly half of the participants (48%) required both written and spoken English communication in their professional roles, aligning with the growing demand for bilingual proficiency in the globalized workforce. This need reflects the critical role English plays in both technical and communicative tasks, such as reading technical documents, writing emails, and conducting interdepartmental correspondence. Previous studies corroborate these observations, emphasizing that English is an essential skill for professional success, particularly in multinational or technical environments (Graddol, 2006; Neeley, 2012). Moreover, research by Evans (2013) highlights the prevalence of English in workplace communication, especially for activities like email correspondence and document preparation. The 25% of participants who reported no need for English at work may represent professionals in roles with limited international or interdepartmental interaction, as suggested by Taguchi (2014), who noted variations in English use across industries and job functions. These findings point to the importance of tailoring English for specific workplace needs, ensuring both linguistic and functional relevance for employees in diverse professional settings.

Regarding writing skills, findings obtained from both the questionnaire and the interviews suggest a consistency with the literature that email was the leading activity in writing English, followed by writing reports (Benke, 2016; Chan, 2014; Kim, 2021). Just at this point, it is worth reminding that as Louhiala-Salminen (1996, p. 43) predicted "*the importance of writing has increased along with the introduction of the new electronic media; what was earlier communicated over the telephone*". The functions and purpose of language skills have evolved, and writing can serve oral communication functions while different forms of oral communication can take place on digital platforms or even social media as well. Such intersections of the academic research and identifications by the employees can constitute a sign of significant awareness of the role of English in real business vs school contexts that curriculum planners, course book authors or publishers can benefit from these findings about deciding on the content in language teaching.

The findings related to reading skills indicate a strong alignment with the use of writing skills and written language activities in the workplace. Reading skills were identified as particularly

significant by nearly half of the employers surveyed, a trend consistent across various sectors and countries, as highlighted by the Cambridge English Report (2016). This marks the notability of reading proficiency in professional contexts, especially for engaging with job-related materials and documents. Previous research supports this emphasis, noting that reading is a core component of workplace communication, particularly in fields requiring frequent interaction with technical documents, scientific literature, and official reports (Evans, 2013). Furthermore, Bhatia and Bremner (2012) argue that the ability to comprehend and analyze domain-specific texts is critical for effective performance in professional environments. The participants in this study also expressed a preference for reading job-related professional materials, reflecting the increasing need for functional literacy in English to stay updated with industry advancements and global trends. These findings highlight the necessity for language programs to prioritize reading skills, particularly in professional and academic English courses, to better equip individuals for the demands of their careers.

Regarding speaking skills at the workplace, 59% of our participants reported using English-speaking skills primarily for occupational purposes. This finding aligns with research by Glomo-Narzoles and Glomo-Palermo (2021), which identified speaking as the most frequently used language skill in multinational companies. Effective oral communication is often critical in professional settings for tasks such as presentations, meetings, and client interactions. However, our participants also expressed mixed levels of confidence about their speaking abilities, highlighting concerns about their fluency and appropriateness in diverse contexts. In line with these findings, Neeley (2012) emphasized that speaking skills are pivotal in global business operations, where employees must navigate both formal and informal communication scenarios. Furthermore, research by Evans (2013) demonstrated that small talk and informal conversations play a key role in workplace socialization, fostering relationships and enhancing teamwork. Participants in our study similarly revealed that their speaking needs extend beyond formal or technical discussions to include informal exchanges, such as socializing and having casual conversations with colleagues. This is supported by Taguchi (2014), who noted that informal speaking opportunities are essential for building communicative competence and confidence in workplace settings. These findings suggest that language instruction for professional purposes should incorporate both formal and informal speaking scenarios, equipping learners with the skills needed to succeed in diverse workplace interactions.

The findings regarding listening skills indicate that 65% of the participants reported a specific interest in and use of English listening skills, underscoring the importance of this skill in both professional and personal contexts. A notable observation from the interviews is that 36% of participants engaged in listening activities such as watching movies, series, and videos in English. These activities, while seemingly recreational, were purposefully undertaken to enhance listening comprehension for professional interactions, such as understanding presentations. This was also emphasized by the studies which take attention to the pivotal role of listening skills in effective communication, particularly in multilingual and multicultural workplace environments (Rost, 2013). The use of audiovisual materials for listening practice is also supported by research. Wilson (2008) highlights that exposure to authentic listening sources, such as movies and series, significantly aids in developing real-world comprehension skills. Furthermore, Flowerdew and Miller (2005) argue that listening is not only foundational to communication but also often a precursor to other skills, such as speaking and collaboration, particularly during meetings or presentations. Additionally, the emphasis participants placed on understanding spoken English for workplace communication reflects the findings of Vandergrift and Goh (2012), who identified listening as a critical skill for achieving effective interaction in professional and social contexts. The challenges reported by the participants regarding listening comprehension further highlight the need for targeted training that simulates real-life professional scenarios, such as presentations and discussions, to build confidence and improve their listening abilities.

Following the usage of language skills at the workplace, the findings with regard to challenges to communicate in English reveal that 80% of the participants identified significant challenges in speaking English, primarily due to difficulties with accuracy, fluency, and the need to consciously think about grammar rules and appropriate vocabulary. Although grammar was not explicitly noted as a primary challenge in the questionnaire, the interviews highlighted its role as a barrier to effective communication, particularly when combined with issues like accent comprehension and vocabulary limitations. This is consistent with research by Derwing and Munro (2009), who emphasize that concerns over grammatical accuracy and accent difficulties can negatively impact both fluency and confidence in spoken interactions. Participants also reported hesitations when initiating conversations and selecting appropriate words or structures, which was also mentioned in Levelt's (1989) speech production model, suggesting that cognitive overload from monitoring grammar and vocabulary can slow down speech production.

Furthermore, the challenge of understanding non-native accents, such as French speakers of English, reflects findings by Jenkins (2007), who highlighted intelligibility issues in English as a Lingua Franca interactions, particularly in noisy environments like meetings and fairs. This suggests that accent comprehension is not only a linguistic challenge but also a situational one. Participants' struggles with field-specific jargon underscore the importance of targeted professional language training, as noted by Evans (2013), who argued that limited knowledge of workplace-specific terminology can hinder both understanding and communication. These findings suggest adopting a multifaceted approach to addressing speaking challenges, incorporating fluency-focused practice, accent exposure, and professional jargon training to enhance communication effectiveness in English course programs.

A transition from the language needs to the training to meet those needs highlights that college-graduate employees need to improve their speaking skills. Related findings indicate that employees predominantly perceive a need to improve their speaking skills, particularly for tasks such as giving presentations, communicating with clients, and participating in international fairs. Neeley (2012) also supported this by explaining that speaking proficiency is critical in global business environments, where oral communication often determines professional success. Participants highlighted the realization of their speaking deficiencies after entering the workforce, reflecting a gap between the language training provided in schools and the practical communication demands of the workplace. This gap was corroborated by Evans (2013), who found that many employees struggle with oral communication due to insufficient emphasis on speaking skills during their formal education. Interestingly, participants who reported not seeking additional language training often indicated that their work required only written communication. This points to the varied linguistic demands across job roles, supporting Taguchi's (2014) observation that English use in the workplace varies significantly depending on the context and role. However, the acknowledgment that speaking skills would necessitate training if required suggests a recognition of its critical role in professional advancement.

The reported practice of companies assessing English proficiency during the hiring process reflects the global trend of prioritizing language skills in recruitment, as noted by Cambridge English Report (2016). This practice ensures that candidates meet the linguistic requirements of their roles and reduces the need for post-hiring language training. These findings highlight the importance of bridging the gap between academic language instruction and workplace language needs, with a particular focus on oral communication skills to better prepare employees for the globalized workforce.

As English continues to serve as the lingua franca of global business, its role extends beyond personal skill development to shaping organizational efficiency, cross-cultural communication, and professional success in diverse industries. Exploring the role of English at the workplace provides further insights into its impact on professional interactions and overall workplace dynamics. Findings regarding the role of the English language in employment illustrate some privileges for the employees. As presented in Table 8, according to our participants, English plays

a significant role in both promotion and recruitment. Better job opportunities and chances to be promoted are among the functions and effects of English proficiency at the workplace. Responses to the questionnaire and the interviewee statements seem to be concordant with the relevant findings of the Cambridge English Report (2016), although the report did not include any data regarding business life in Türkiye. The report presented findings from employers as *"In countries and territories where English is not an official language, over half of all employers offer better packages to applicants with good English skills"* (2016, p. 30), and *"... employers are most likely to offer salary increases and/or faster job progression."* (p. 31). In other words, as stated by Glomo-Narzoles and Glomo-Palermo (2021) limited language proficiency can confine the growth potential of employees, cause communication difficulties among colleagues, and affect worker safety negatively. Bluntly, it can be concluded that findings from this study suggest the significance of the English language both in the recruitment process and promotion stages too.

While the role of English in the workplace highlights its critical importance for professional success, it also raises questions about the adequacy of English instruction in preparing individuals for these demands. This concern is particularly relevant at the college level, where students are expected to develop the language skills needed for their future careers. Examining the satisfaction levels of college graduates with the English instruction they received sheds light on whether higher education effectively bridges the gap between academic learning and workplace expectations. Findings regarding the second research question about the satisfaction with the English instruction at tertiary level indicated that the participants have suggestions which can contribute to English language teaching curriculum development studies at schools. 64% of the participants agreed that common themes presented in English classes (and mostly in coursebooks) can be acceptable, but 95% were not satisfied with the English instruction at schools in Türkiye. Triangulation of the data helped identify their reasons and suggestions, which might signal valuable hints, especially for curriculum developers, coursebook authors and teachers. Problem-solving, empathy, science, technology, business, technical terminology, and popular culture were among the themes suggested by our participants to take place in English language courses. Summarizing, inferencing, reading academic papers, reviewing literature and learning the jargon of their field were noted among the skills to be included in language classes. This kind of data is specifically meaningful because identifying ideal authentic language and authentic activities can be designed based on an evaluation of such information from the field.

The literature on ESP includes similar significant suggestions obtained from the workplace. Using simulation and role play in English class to boost learners' communicative skills, creative game for teaching communicative language, crossword puzzles, using audiovisual aids to teach communicative English, the use of film and videotapes for communicative purposes, using songs to teach communicative English, pair/small group task, using discussions to teach communicative English are among the communicative activities suggested in the literature to be included in effective ESP courses (Jeannette, 2022). Not surprisingly, such a view of ESP course methodology has implications for language teachers' professional development procedures and practices as well. The review of the literature and findings from our study suggest a need to do further research for a deeper understanding of the graduates' English language needs at the workplace.

## 5. Conclusion

This study primarily aimed at exploring needs and challenges related to foreign language use, particularly English, in professional settings. Many participants noted that their formal education in English falls short of real-world needs. They struggled with fluency, technical jargon, and specific terms at the workplace. Practical language use through online gaming, media or participating in conversation is seen as beneficial in improving language skills. Additionally, effective communication, especially when dealing with technical terms, was challenging for most participants. They expressed difficulties in explaining computer-related issues or providing user support in English, often encountering language barriers during written and verbal exchanges.

There is a consensus on the need for more customized English courses. Participants emphasized that vocational language training would help bridge the gap between academic English and the language skills required in their professions. Some participants stated that they faced accent and pronunciation issues when interacting with individuals from various linguistic backgrounds. Non-verbal communication and cultural understanding are highlighted as crucial components of successful language use in global interactions.

Participants also reflected on their learning journeys, often acknowledging that their teachers' emphasis on pronunciation sometimes undermined their confidence. They recommended more practical, experience-based language learning methods, such as role-play and project-based exercises, for better retention and application. English proficiency was found to be a critical factor in the hiring and promotion processes. Participants noted that foreign language skills were not optional but a prerequisite for career advancement, with interviews and assessments in English becoming common.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role that foreign language proficiency, particularly English, plays in the professional success of individuals across various fields. The findings suggest that formal education systems often fail to equip students with the practical language skills necessary for real-world applications, leading to communication challenges in professional environments. Participants emphasized the need for vocational language training tailored to specific industries and practical experiences that mirror workplace demands. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity, non-verbal communication, and accent awareness were integral components of effective communication in a globalized professional landscape. Addressing these issues through enhanced educational practices and targeted language training programs will not only improve individual confidence and competence but also lead to more effective communication and greater career opportunities in a competitive, multilingual world.

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**Data availability:** The data supporting this study's findings are available upon request. Interested researchers may contact the corresponding author for access to the data.

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