

## Investigation of English Language Proficiency in an Algerian Gas Company

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**Abstract:** This study explores English language use within an Algerian oil company, analysing employees' educational profiles, training engagement, and self-reported proficiency levels. The results indicate a heterogeneous workforce with varying degrees of English competence and differing levels of motivation to pursue further language learning. Speaking emerged as the most essential skill for professional communication, reflecting the company's operational requirements. The study provides a clearer understanding of employees' linguistic needs and highlights the importance of developing targeted English training programs to enhance work place communication and performance.

**Keywords:** Education levels, English language learning, listening, reading, writing.

**Résumé :** Cette étude explore l'usage de l'anglais au sein d'une compagnie pétrolière algérienne, en analysant les profils scolaires des employés, leur implication dans la formation et leurs niveaux de compétence linguistique auto-déclarés. Les résultats indiquent une main-d'œuvre hétérogène présentant différents niveaux de compétence en anglais et des motivations variées à poursuivre son apprentissage linguistique. L'expression orale s'est révélée être la compétence essentielle à la communication professionnelle, reflétant les exigences opérationnelles de l'entreprise. L'étude permet de mieux comprendre les besoins linguistiques des employés et souligne l'importance de développer des programmes de formation en anglais ciblés afin d'améliorer la communication et la performance au travail.

**Mots-clés :** niveaux d'éducation, apprentissage de l'anglais, écoute, lecture, écriture.

## **1. Introduction**

Following the conclusion of World War II, a significant expansion in international technology, trade, and diplomacy fundamentally reshaped global interactions and communication. This period facilitated the widespread adoption of English as a multilateral medium of communication, a trend solidified by the economic dominance of the USA, which firmly established English as a joint language across the globe. Consequently, learning English has evolved from a simple academic subject into a global necessity for professionals. Today, in the era of globalization, English is not just an indispensable tool for international collaboration, business, and cultural exchange, but also the primary language of scientific and technological advancement across all professional fields.

This global linguistic shift gave rise to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a focused approach to language learning designed to help specific sectors and individuals keep pace with the rapid advancements that emerged in the aftermath of WWII. This approach is distinct from English for General Purposes (EGP), which addresses broader language needs. As defined by (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), ESP is a teaching approach where "all the decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning." This principle reflects the core essence of ESP: adapting to the specific contexts and needs of certain professional groups (Strevens, 1980; Strevens, 1988). The concept was further developed by (Dudley-Evans, 1998), who added the idea of variable values, thereby outlining a comprehensive and flexible framework for the approach. The success of any ESP program relies heavily on a thorough understanding of the learners' specific needs, which are directly tied to their professional roles and specialized activities (Howatt, 1984).

The debate between teaching English for general purposes (EGP) and English for specific purposes (ESP) is not limited to Algeria; it is a global issue that has also attracted the attention of researchers in Mexico, for example. A study conducted at a Mexican public university explored students' needs and perceptions regarding English learning, and showed how a group of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers successfully implemented a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach within an ESP. This research highlights the difficulties teachers faced in adapting students' needs to pedagogical proposals, and found that students had a positive perception of the material and the overall approach (Trujeque-Moreno, 2021).

The prevalence of ESP is especially notable in critical industries such as the oil and gas domain, where English has become the global business language (Dudley-Evans, 1998). The importance of clear communication in this sector cannot be overstated. The hazardous nature of the working environment leaves little

tolerance for errors, and even the slightest linguistic mistake can have high-cost consequences and potentially put human lives at risk. Furthermore, motivation is a cornerstone element in driving individuals to engage in language acquisition activities. A study on motivation for learning English in an Algerian university context found that instrumental and personal factors are highly correlated with an individual's preference for the language (Ben-yelles Linda, 2024). This finding aligns with the professional demands of the oil and gas sector, where proficiency in a specialized form of English is not just a job requirement but is essential for safety, career advancement, and successful business operations.

This research aims to contribute to this understanding by focusing on the pioneering experience of In Salah Gas, a company that has adopted ESP as a primary component of its specialized language methodology. The company's efforts to ensure precise and effective communication within its culturally rich and diverse workforce provide a valuable case study for analyzing the practical application of ESP principles. The primary objective of this investigation is to explore the pioneering efforts of In Salah Gas in preparing its environment and workforce for the use of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This includes an in-depth analysis of the teaching methods and techniques employed, as well as an evaluation of the crucial role of vocational courses in helping workers adapt and perform their tasks effectively. By examining this specific case, this study ultimately aims to propose suitable methods for teaching and integrating ESP in similar institutions to benefit both current staff and potential new hires.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining abstract quantitative and qualitative research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of learners in a particular context. The research design was grounded in Weihua's needs analysis (Weihua, 2002), with the primary needs analysis data collected through a comprehensive online questionnaire. This questionnaire, which contained 11 questions, was addressed to employees of the In Salah Gas company from different departments and teams. The questionnaire was designed to cover multiple categories of company personnel, ensuring a broad view of their needs, opinions, and communication skills within the workplace, including oral and written skills, and their perceptions of the company's English language training curriculum. The data from this survey will be used to construct a mini-database to evaluate the effectiveness of the training programs and their alignment with the employees' actual needs.

The theoretical framework for the needs analysis was also guided by the McDonough model, considered one of the most important ESP needs analysis models (McDonough and Shaw, 2012). This model places students at the center of the system for designing any ESP course, viewing "needs" as a variable that adapts to context rather than a fixed value (see Figure 1). The needs analysis is therefore a complex process that requires input from various perspectives, including learners, teachers, and sponsoring institutions. This approach is supported by a similar study on Saudi engineering students, which also used a mixed-methods approach and found that a thorough needs analysis is crucial for determining important language tasks in technical fields (Alsamadani et al., 2017).



Figure 1. ESP Needs Analysis Model – McDonough 2012

Additionally, a qualitative study in a Colombian university demonstrated the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in integrating language skills and enhancing communicative competence (Córdoba, 2016). This finding reinforces the pedagogical approach taken in our research, which views meaningful tasks as a way to promote skills integration. The importance of this approach is further supported by (Glomo and Glomo, 2021), who found that a lack of specialized language can negatively impact employees' potential for advancement and security in multinational companies.

To ensure broad participation, the questionnaire was prepared in both English and Arabic. This bilingual approach was crucial, as (Alghammas, 2020) notes that the structural differences between English and Arabic can make learning English

challenging for native Arabic speakers. The questionnaire link was distributed via the personnel's work emails, with personal emails used to reach employees on leave. The questions were constructed in a multiple-choice format to facilitate easy responses and data analysis. Information was collected on gender, education, work experience, English proficiency, and the social and functional impact of the company's training programs. Participants were also allowed to answer anonymously to ensure comfort and honest responses. The final sample from the questionnaire included 84 participants from various work teams, providing a diverse representation of the workforce.

In addition to the survey, key employees from the Training and Development Department were interviewed to gather further qualitative insights. A total of 19 employees participated in these interviews. The feedback from both the survey and the interviews was analyzed both statistically and descriptively, offering a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of the ESP training programs.

### 3. Survey Results

The survey results from the questionnaire provide a clear and detailed insight into the demographics, language proficiency, and communication priorities of the In Salah Gas workforce (Algeria).

#### 3.1. Gender Demographics

Figure 2 illustrates the gender distribution among the survey participants, revealing a significant gender disparity. The data shows that 91.3% of respondents were male, while only 8.7% were female. This finding is consistent with the company's internal statistics, which indicate a predominantly male workforce, a common demographic in the oil and gas industry.

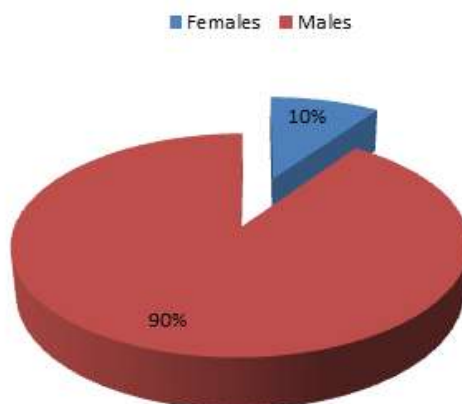


**Figure 2.** Gender of Participants

### 3.2. Employee Educational Background

This figure provides a detailed breakdown of the educational qualifications of the employees who participated in the survey. The data highlights a highly skilled and educated workforce, with a majority (51.7%) holding an engineering degree. A significant portion of the employees (37%) possess a pre-university diploma, while 9% have master's degrees, and 2.3% hold PhDs. This varied educational background reflects the diverse range of technical and administrative roles within the company.

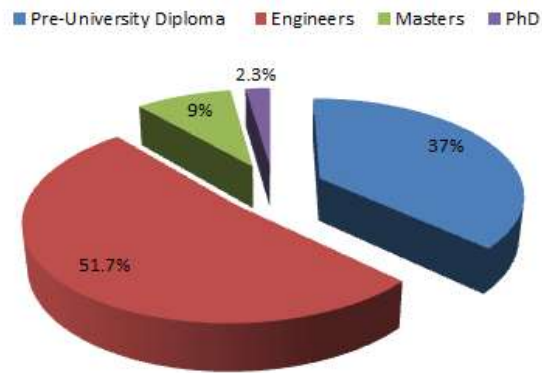


**Figure 3.** Education Level of Participants

### 3.3. Work Experience Distribution

Figure 4 shows the work experience distribution among the surveyed employees, indicating a largely seasoned workforce. The data reveals that 43% of participants have more than five years of experience. A substantial portion of the employees (31%) have been working for three to five years, and 22% have experience ranging from one to three years. The smallest group, representing only 4% of the sample, has less than one year of experience and is primarily composed of recent graduates.

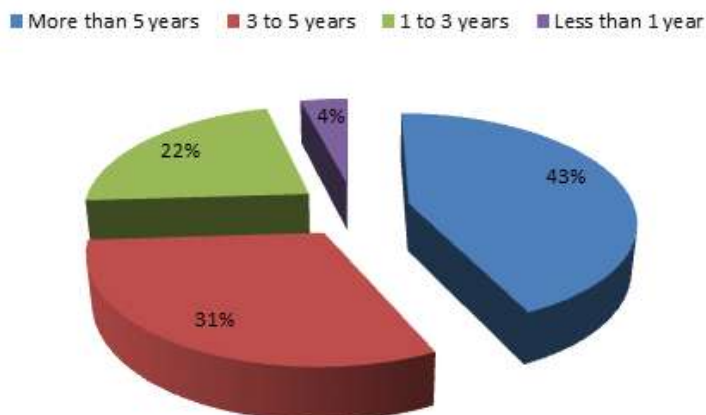


**Figure 4.** Years of Experience of Participants

### 3.5. English Course Enrollment

Figure 5 presents the results of a question asking employees if they were currently taking English language courses. The data shows that a majority of the participants (59.5%) were actively enrolled in courses, demonstrating a strong commitment to skill improvement among the workforce. Conversely, 40.5% had either stopped their studies or were not interested in further language learning, highlighting a notable discrepancy in employee motivation that warrants further investigation.

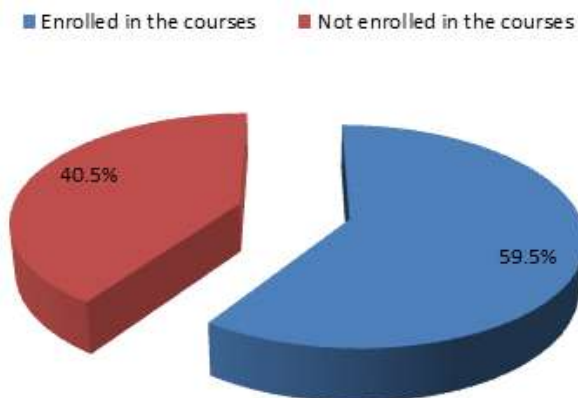


**Figure 5.** Number of Participants Currently Enrolled in English Courses

### 3.6. Self-Assessed English Proficiency

Figure 6 displays the self-assessed English proficiency levels of the participants. The results indicate that a significant portion of the workforce has a high level of proficiency, with 43.9% of employees considering themselves intermediate, 37.7% rating their proficiency as advanced, and 20.4% identifying as beginners. Another analysis of the same data shows a similar distribution with 37% having excellent proficiency, 43% at an intermediate level, and 20% being beginners. This suggests that while a large portion of the workforce is proficient, there is a clear segment of employees who could benefit from additional training.

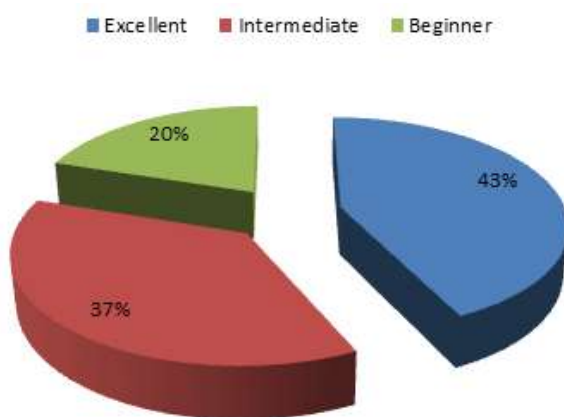


**Figure 6.** English Proficiency Level

### 3.6. Employee English Speaking Skills

Figure 7 focuses specifically on the self-assessed English speaking skills of the participants, with a small number of employees choosing not to respond. The results are positive, with 45.3% of respondents speaking the language well, 22.9% having very good speaking skills, and 20.4% considering their speaking skills to be excellent. Only 11.4% rated their speaking skills as poor. The high percentages of employees reporting good to excellent speaking skills may be a testament to the effectiveness of the company's language training programs, which are designed to enhance communicative abilities in professional settings.

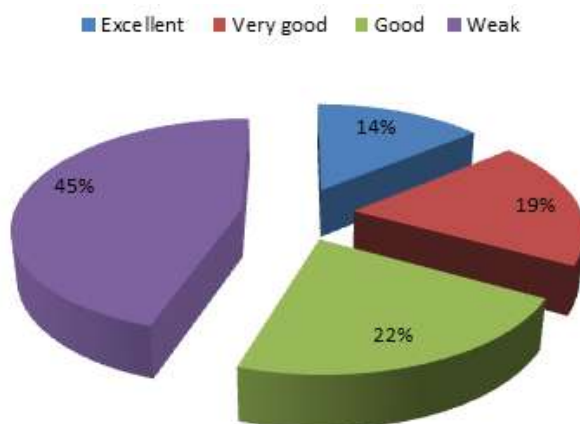


**Figure 7.** Participants' Language Skills/ English Speaking Skill

### 3.8. Priority of Language Skills

Figure 8 highlights the language skills that employees consider most important for their jobs. The data reveals a strong prioritization of verbal communication, as a vast majority (71.74%) of participants considered speaking to be the most important skill. This is in sharp contrast to writing, which was prioritized by only 20.23% of respondents, with smaller proportions for reading and listening. This emphasis on speaking is likely due to the nature of the work, where many employees are site workers who rely heavily on verbal communication via telephone or radios.

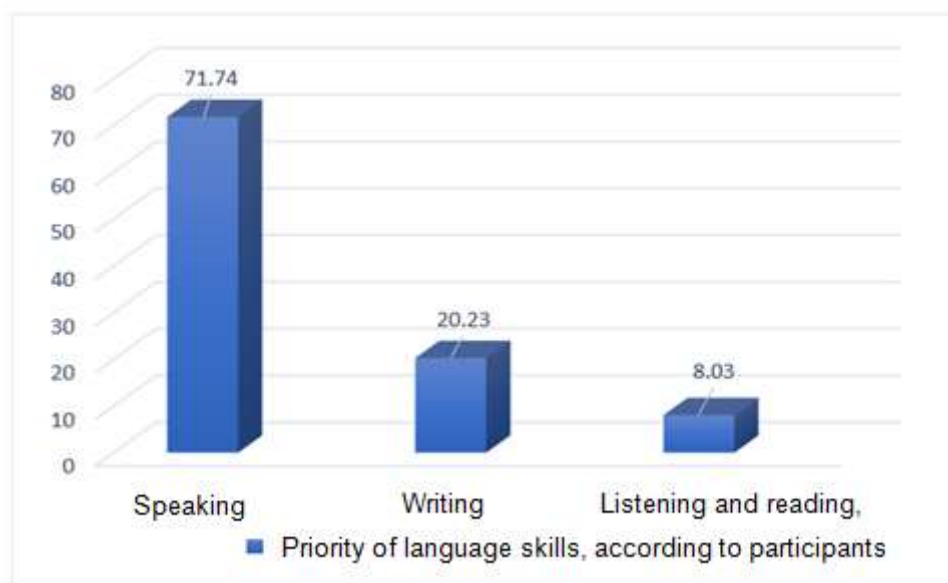


**Figure 8.** Priority of Language Skills According to the Participants

### 3.9. Prior International Experience

Figure 9 details the previous professional experience of the 19 employees who participated in direct interviews. It shows that 57.89% of these individuals had prior experience using English as a primary language in international companies or countries. The remaining interviewees had their main experience with companies in Algeria that use functional English extensively, and are mostly Algerian or from other non-English-speaking countries. This indicates that a majority of the key employees interviewed had prior exposure to a professional English-speaking environment.

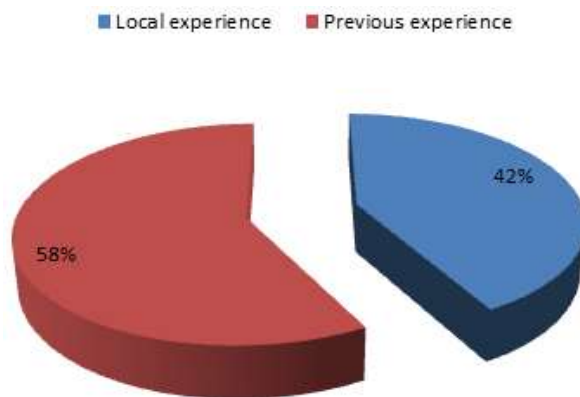


**Figure 9.** Participants' Experiences of Working in Companies/Countries that use English

### 3.10. Discussion of Findings

The results of this study provide a comprehensive look at the state of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within In Salah Gas, highlighting both successes and areas for potential improvement. The survey of the predominantly male workforce (91.3%) with a high level of education (51.7% with engineering degrees or PhDs) and significant experience (43% with over five years) serves as a solid foundation for understanding the linguistic needs of a highly technical environment.

#### 3.10.1. The Role of English for Professional Advancement

The data strongly supports the notion that English proficiency is critical for both employment and career progression at In Salah Gas. A significant majority of respondents—79.05%—confirmed that English knowledge was a requirement for their employment, and an even higher percentage (77.96%) agreed that it was necessary for promotion. These findings confirm the study's initial premise that, in multinational companies like In Salah Gas, English proficiency has evolved from a simple skill into a global necessity. Interestingly, while the practice of English is highly valued, the data shows that a formal language certificate is not a prerequisite for employment or promotion, suggesting that practical, on-the-job application is prioritized over formal qualifications.

#### 3.10.2. Communication Needs and Challenges

The survey results reveal a strong prioritization of speaking skills, with 71.74% of employees identifying it as the most important communication skill for their jobs. This finding is consistent with the nature of the oil and gas industry, where on-site workers rely heavily on verbal communication. While employees generally rated

their speaking skills highly (with over 88% rating their skills as "well," "very good," or "excellent"), the study also uncovered challenges in communication. Participants noted difficulties understanding non-native and even some native English speakers due to varying accents and dialects. This underscores the importance of not just learning standard English, but also developing robust communication strategies to navigate a truly multicultural work environment.

### **3.10.3. Effectiveness of Training Programs and Company Culture**

In Salah Gas appears to have successfully fostered a positive environment for language learning. A majority of employees (59.5%) were actively enrolled in English courses, and a high percentage of expat staff (89.3%) noted a sense of harmony in the use of professional English among different nationalities. This positive perception is attributed to the company's continuous language course implementation and the influence of a foreign partner who prioritizes employee training. The interviews with the Training and Development Department staff also noted that employees who underwent internal training showed "higher and clearer" linguistic improvement, suggesting that the company's in-house programs are effective. The company's success in gathering training groups that take into account the wide variation in linguistic levels among different departments—from caretakers to engineers—further demonstrates a thoughtful and inclusive approach to language development.

### **3.10.4. Limitations and Future Implications**

While the study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, particularly the small sample size and potential for participant bias. The low response rate, attributed to the work environment and the rotational schedules of employees, limits the generalizability of the results. However, the findings do suggest several avenues for future research, such as exploring the motivational differences between learning English for career advancement versus personal interest. The study also highlights the potential for the company to better align its training initiatives with promotion criteria, which could further incentivize employees to enhance their language proficiency.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study confirms the vital importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within a multinational company like In Salah Gas. The findings demonstrate a clear link between language proficiency and professional advancement, as 79.05% of employees reported that English was a requirement for their employment and 77.96% considered it necessary for promotion.

The analysis of the workforce reveals a high degree of linguistic engagement and skill. A majority of employees (59.5%) were actively enrolled in English courses, and most rated their speaking skills as good or excellent. This is particularly relevant given that 71.74% of employees identified speaking as the most critical communication skill for their jobs. The company's efforts to provide a supportive learning environment have been successful, as evidenced by a high degree of harmony in professional English use among different nationalities (89.3% of expats agreed). This collaborative atmosphere and the commitment to continuous training provide a strong foundation for the company's future.

While the study highlights the company's achievements, it also points to areas for improvement. The limited sample size and low response rate due to the work environment and employee schedules present a limitation to the generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, the results suggest that In Salah Gas is on a positive trajectory, successfully integrating ESP to ensure precise and effective communication, which is crucial for a high-stakes industry where even the slightest linguistic error could have severe consequences.

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