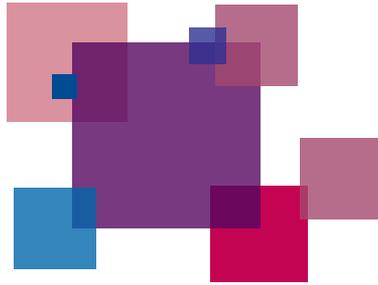


English at Work

An Analysis of Case Reports about English Language Training for the 21st-century Workforce

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The International Research Foundation
for English Language Education

This brochure provides a summary of key findings from *English at Work: An Analysis of Case Reports about English Language Training for the 21st-century Workforce*. To read or download the full version of the paper, please visit: www.tirfonline.org

Executive Summary

This study set out to identify the role that English plays in the 21st-century workplace and to explore how learners and workers around the world, both in English-speaking countries and in those where English is a foreign language, are being prepared to use English efficiently and effectively in their



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fields of work. For successful global cooperation, a common language is required, and there is no doubt that English has taken on this role in the 21st century. With this point in mind, The International Research Foundation for English Language Education (TIRF) commissioned this study to explore how people around the world are being prepared to use English at work.

Approach Used in the Study

More than 100 recent books, articles, reports, and websites related to English language training for business, vocational, and professional purposes were reviewed. The findings of that literature review were related to twenty substantive case reports submitted to TIRF by English teaching professionals from various countries. The case report contributors represent English language training programs for business, vocational, and professional purposes. The information from the case reports was then discussed in terms of the English language needs of both immigrant workers in English-speaking

countries and workers in a range of contexts where English serves as the means of communication among speakers of various languages.

Two main questions were addressed in this study. First, what English-related skills are needed for the 21st-century



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workforce? Second, how are members of the modern-day workforce being trained to develop English language skills throughout their professional careers? The first question was addressed through the literature review and the second by analyzing the themes that arose in the case reports. The answers to these questions indicate that there has been a substantial paradigm shift in course design and English language teaching methods. This development addresses the new aims and objectives defined as essential in the modern world, and also better meets the language needs of workforce learners and their organizations.

The 21st-century Workforce

The paradigm shift referred to above is due, in part, to the fact that English is no longer seen as something to be taught separately from other subjects and skills. Rather, it is a tool to help people utilize a range of skills in their daily practice. Thus, English language training for current employees or for

those preparing to join the workforce should reflect and be combined with the development of other skills needed in the 21st-century workplace. These 21st-century skills complement the specific job-related expertise that graduates and workers bring to the workforce in their own disciplines.



21st-century skills include those that enable workers to communicate and collaborate with others, organize and analyze information, make informed decisions, and then take decisive action. The skills required demand the deployment of the innovative abilities, technological knowledge, and career skills required in modern societies. The case reports which are presented in the study show how language training organizations are meeting these new challenges and how language teachers are designing curricula and training materials to satisfy the immediate and long-term needs of their learners.

Other key competences deemed necessary for active citizenship, social cohesion, and employability in a knowledge society include the ability to communicate in foreign languages, digital competence, and social and civic competences, as well as cultural awareness and expression. All of these competences are being implemented through the use of English in many of the working contexts examined in this study.

The analysis of the case reports revealed that English language teaching methods and course design for training the workforce currently emphasize interdisciplinarity between language and the combination of professional and cultural content. The teaching of subject matter through English has become a much more common practice than in the past. In addition, we have seen an increase in project-based approaches to classroom learning, which allow students to put into practice both the foreign language and the applied skills that they need for the workplace. These project-based approaches often involve the use of online tools and resources. These developments have led to a change in the approach and work of language teachers, who are now expected to integrate all these elements into their teaching.

Communicative Needs of the 21st-century Workforce

What are the English language communicative needs of the 21st-century workforce? Those courses which have traditionally been called “business English” and “English for specific purposes” have mainly emphasized developing future workers’ skills in the classic business tasks of formal presentations, letter and email writing, formal negotiations, etc. However, recent studies highlight the importance of English for informal interaction and socializing in workforce contexts. English learners urgently need to be sensitized to communicative strategies for establishing relationships and maintaining rapport in the workplace. In meetings, the ability to take part in discussions is considered much more important than actually carrying out formal presentations. In addition,

participation in teamwork is vital for job success.

Furthermore, increased awareness of cultural differences that may arise in the workplace in both oral and written forms of communication is essential in the contemporary workplace, where personnel are of different ages and represent a range of linguistic, ethnic, and social backgrounds.



The case reports represent workforce training programs offered in a wide range of professional fields from an array of geographical backgrounds.

Case Reports and Principle Trends

The case reports summarized in this paper show a rich variety of courses offered in a wide range of professional fields (including dentistry, nursing, the military, diplomatic services, engineering, and finance and general business, among others). These courses are offered to learners from an array of geographical backgrounds, including Australia, Japan, Latin America, Europe, the Gulf region, China, Hong Kong, and the United States. The case reports offer practical portraits of how the principles, aims, and methods found in the literature review are being put into practice around the world. Summaries of the case reports are provided to help readers decide which ones might be of particular interest for them before they consult the corresponding full case reports on the TIRF website.

The principal trends and developments identified in the case reports were

- a move towards specialization and personalization of English language training;
- the consolidation of online technologies as tools for learning and teaching;
- the increased recognition given to cultural aspects of language and communication;
- a rise in the use of project-based learning and authentic materials;
- the use of English to teach discipline- or career-specific content;
- the importance of autonomy and developing the skills of learner independence; and
- the vital importance of higher management support of English programs.

In contrast, two themes identified in the literature review received relatively little attention in the case reports: learner mobility within study programs and preparation for 21st-century literacies.

The paper suggests implications for companies and organizations that wish to improve workers' English language skills. Recommendations are also made for workforce training providers and for language learners themselves.

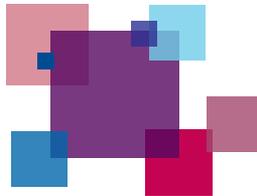
Based upon the findings of the study, a preliminary checklist for those wishing to set up or evaluate a language course for workers in a specific vocational or professional setting is provided at the end of the full report.



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About TIRF

Formed in June 1998, The International Research Foundation for English Language Education (TIRF) is committed to developing knowledge about English language learning and teaching in various settings through a coherent program of research, dissemination, and networking. TIRF's Board of Trustees, which serves on a voluntary basis, is drawn from academia, publishing, business, and government. TIRF raises funds entirely from charitable donations. To date, TIRF has awarded monies to fund 56 research projects involving 76 researchers from around the world.



Download the full version of the TIRF report *English at Work: An Analysis of Case Reports about English Language Training for the 21st-century Workforce* at: www.tirfonline.org

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