



PERCEPTIONS OF HOSPITAL STAFF TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH AND WORK CULTURE AT A PRIVATE HOSPITAL IN JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

Intakhab Alam Khanⁱ,

Fariha Asif

Dr., King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

This paper sheds light on the perception of hospital staff towards learning English and work culture at a private hospital known as the IMC of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. English is one of the advantages for working in a good hospital like this one which is quite advanced and equipped, and the work culture is suitable for continuous professional development. The paper also attempts to examine the ways which can be used to improve proficiency of English among the hospital professionals. After the selection of a convenient-purposive sample of 75 hospital professionals, a questionnaire was developed and responses were tabulated and analyzed. Hospital's training unit was also approached to cross check the data elicited from the professionals. The data reveal that most hospital staff has a positive attitude towards learning English for professional reasons. They have a desire to undergo professional training for continuous and further development in addition to the current work culture suitable for practicing English. The study also reflects on the efforts done by the hospital administration to train the employees for specific English to be used in the hospital for health purposes.

Keywords: perception, learning English, hospital staff, work culture, training programs

1. Introduction

Importance of English in general and ESP in particular has been increasing gradually for many years, especially in the health centre. There are many factors associated with the issue. Among the crucial factors is the perception towards the foreign language

ⁱ Correspondence: email dr.intakhab@yahoo.com, ikhan1@kau.edu.sa

learning. The Oxford English Dictionary (2010) defines perception as one's awareness and understanding of sensory information attained through interplay between past experiences, one's own culture and the interpretation of the perceived (Safadi *et al.*, 2011). Despaigne (2010) elaborates that perceptions are centered on the inner unconscious feelings from which students' attitudes towards learning a language emanate. Thus, attitudes can be defined as the behavioral outcomes of perceptions.

Based on the consistent emphasis of some of the previous studies related to perceptions towards learning English, the researcher hopes to fill the gap in present research by studying the perceptions of hospital staff of IMC-Jeddah, KSA.

The study has the following research questions:

1. Why is English important for the hospital staff?
2. Is English language learning difficult or interesting?
3. Is the hospital administration cooperative for learning/using English?
4. What is the attitude of professionals towards learning English?
5. Are the groups interested in training programs?

2. Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore hospital professionals' perception towards learning/practicing English at their workplace.

3. Literature Review

Perceptions on second language learning domains are quite interesting topics for many researchers especially psycholinguists and applied linguists.

Despaigne's study (2010, p.55) on students learning English at two Mexican universities show their negative perceptions and which he correlated with "*Mexico's colonial past and the effects of linguistic imperialism.*" In a paper on "*Greek Young Learners' Perceptions about Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*", Joyce and Sougari (2010) concluded that there were differences in these perceptions that teachers should observe to yield better learning outcomes. In addition, Thornton (2009, p.84), in a study on the perceptions of college students and their teachers, revealed the reasons behind teachers and students' beliefs about second language learning and concluded that "*all beliefs are inhibitive and facilitative, at the same time, because they were dependent on the individual's needs.*"

Arslan and Akbarov (2012) investigated about EFL learners' perceptions and attitudes towards English for the Specific purposes, and said, "*when we talk about tertiary*

education, students' needs become more specific because they learn English for a specific purpose (ESP)". Spending 5 years at a college/university, the researcher claimed to have witnessed cases in which students from faculties come to us and say they mostly do not understand the terminology used in their lectures".

Moahmmadi, Firooz; Bagheri, Sadegh (2016) explored Iranian EFL learners' perceptions towards deploying professional development activities in ESP context while Xudong, Ying and Varaprasad (2014) researched about the Students' perceptions and attitudes toward the impact of the course on their thesis writing knowledge and skills. ESP's popularity in the teaching of English as a Second Language academic writing has been noticed by Swales (1990, 2004) and Swales & Feak (1994, 2000). A detailed discussion on the effectiveness of such an approach on students' learning of specific genres has so far remained theoretical, felt by Tardy (2009). Few experimental studies have been undertaken to assess whether such an approach has been beneficial for the learners. Writing on the contents of the ESP, Brennan & Naerseen's (1989) work sheds some light on the selection of the appropriate topic.

Ismail (2011) studied SP students' views of ESL grammar learning. The results from the collective data demonstrated that students had positive views about the use of the CCC grammar model. Another significant result revealed the students' beliefs about the positive influence of explicit grammar teaching on learning sentences and oral language.

Lin-Fang Wu (2014) carried out a work on Technical College Students' Perceptions of English for Specific Purposes Vocabulary Learning and Teaching. The results indicated that vocabulary abstractness was the most difficult element of all for a lot of learners. They also felt challenged in the area of pronunciation. Harding (2007, 10–11) is of the opinion that a student can't afford to ignore knowledge of specific terms if he wants to learn and use ESP.

Esmailpour's work (2015) on replacing EGP by ESP at Iranian Universities reported about the opinions and attitudes of university students and English instructors toward English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and ESP-related issues. Both teachers and learners are concerned over the potential problems facing ESP, including shortage of qualified teachers, limited hours of instruction, lack of opportunities to apply English in daily life and the workplace.

The obvious difference lies specific meaning in the field, are not used in GE and mostly have Latin and Greek origin (Robinson, 2009: 37), but there are too many terms in Medical field which have connections to borrowings from language like Latin, Italian and Greek.

Khan (2016) conducted a study in nearly similar context and found that the hospital staff faced different kinds of difficulties in learning and using English at work. However, certain remedial measures and learning strategies were also mentioned.

4. The Study

English, in general as a tool of communication can't be ignored. English for specific purpose (ESP) is currently very significant both professionally and academically. In the preset context, many professionals (the sample of the present study) are quite proficient in communication through English. Even some security men/women are able to pass on some fruitful information in ordinary English. Therefore, in such a competitive work culture, each one of the employees struggle to improve upon English proficiency to be more effective and efficient which can be one of the job requirements and preferences. Hence, it has been felt by the hospital top management in general and the Academy (training unit) in particular to provide professional development programs even in the area of English for specific purposes.

On the basis of the need analysis, groups were made to provide relevant training in specific areas of general and specific English. The study included 75 hospital professionals (of the sample) from different fields. A questionnaire (Appendix- A) was administered to elicit perceptions on the learning/using English.

5. Research design

This is an exploratory descriptive study. Qualitative analysis has been done in order to arrive at conclusions; however, some calculations were also made to substantiate the results.

5.1 Analysis of data

A. Item Analysis

Table 1: Questionnaire (N=75) Appendix-A

Items	Agreed	Undecided	Disagree
1	75	-	-
2	52	9	14
3	9	11	55
4	22	16	37
5	69	3	3
6	55	11	9

Intakhab Alam Khan, Fariha Asif
 PERCEPTIONS OF HOSPITAL STAFF TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH AND WORK CULTURE AT
 A PRIVATE HOSPITAL IN JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

7	35	22	23
8	17	8	50
9	65	8	2
10	69	3	3
11	59	8	8
12	45	23	7
13	22	9	44
14	32	13	30
15	64	5	6
16	45	19	13
17	55	7	13
18	43	22	10
19	73	2	-
20	61	5	9
21	50	13	12
22	65	5	5
23	55	11	9
24	69	3	3

B. Item wise analysis

1. 100% participants agree that they want to learn English.
2. 69% opine that learning English needs practice.
3. Only 12% of employees say that they dislike English, but I have to learn it.
4. Speaking English is fun, state only 29.3% respondents.
5. 92% employees are of the opinion that they enjoy listening to people speaking English. That means they like English, and fascinated towards listening and speaking.
6. Using English is a status symbol is the opinion of 73.3% of IMC employees of the sample.
7. 45.3% employees responded that they need English when they search on the websites.
8. 22.6% respondents confirm that they have attended training courses and have passed levels: 1/2/3 of English conducted at IMC.
9. Around 87 Learning English is essential for my future career.
10. 82% employees are of the opinion that learning English is important for their future.
11. 78.6% professionals believe that English can help them find better jobs.
12. By learning English, the employees can be promoted, perceived 60% of the IMC employees.

13. 29.3% confirm that they need English to pass the Saudi Council exam.
14. English is important in all other hospitals, say only 42.6% employees.
15. More than 85.3% participants confirm that English is very important at IMC.
16. 60% employees affirm that they get chances to use English at their workplace.
17. 73.3 % employees say that they only learn English because managers like it at IMC. The response is not in accordance with other statements related to importance of English as felt by the employees of the sample.
18. Using English creates a good impression at IMC, say around 57% respondents.
19. Nearly all (97.3%) employees confirm that they need English at their workplace.
20. More than 81% assert that they can't do their work without English.
21. The hospital provides training in English in our fields, opined 66.6% staff.
22. IMC arranges long-term training for improvement in English proficiency, say 86.6% respondents.
23. 73.3% believe that the timings of the English courses are suitable.
24. The trainer(s) of English courses are good, according to 92% of the employee-sample.
25. As it was an open ended item, many types of responses were received, however all lead to a positive attitude towards learning, developing and using English.

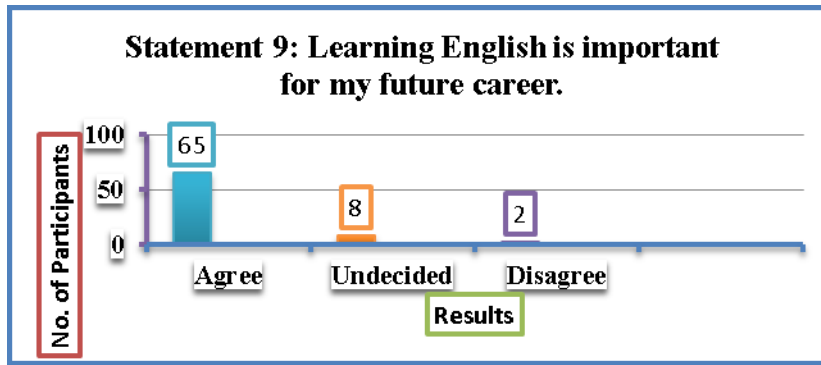
C. Analysis of Key Items

The main analysis follows in accordance with the research questions:

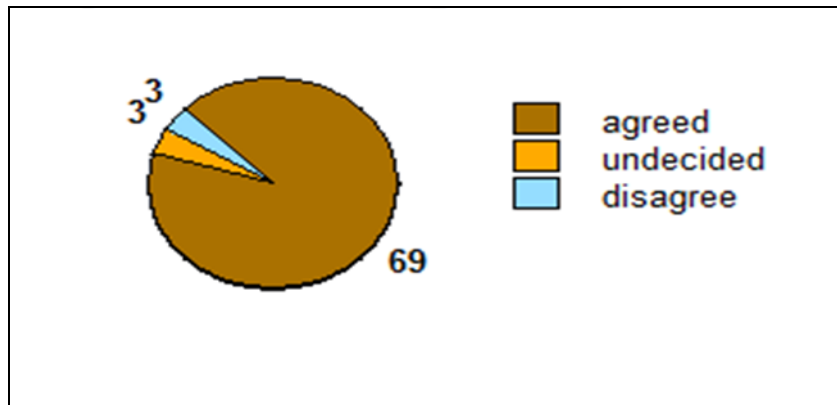
1. Why is English important for the hospital staff?
2. Is English language learning difficult or interesting?
3. Is the hospital administration cooperative for learning/using English?
4. What is the attitude of professionals towards learning English?
5. Is the group interested in training programs?

Research question 1: Why is English important for the hospital staff?

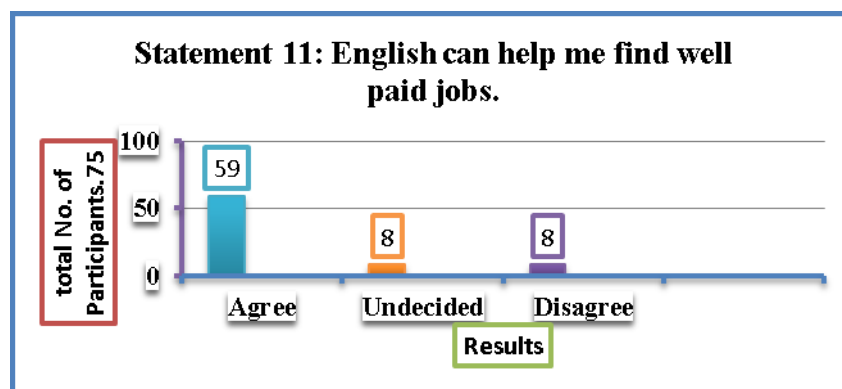
There are many items/statements that relate to importance of English at hospital, however, the following data confirm specifically that English is very important for around 87% participants who agree that learning English is essential for their future career.



In addition, data on statement-10 reveal the importance of English for present job. Some 69 out of 75 employees (82 %) are of the opinion that learning English is important for their present job.

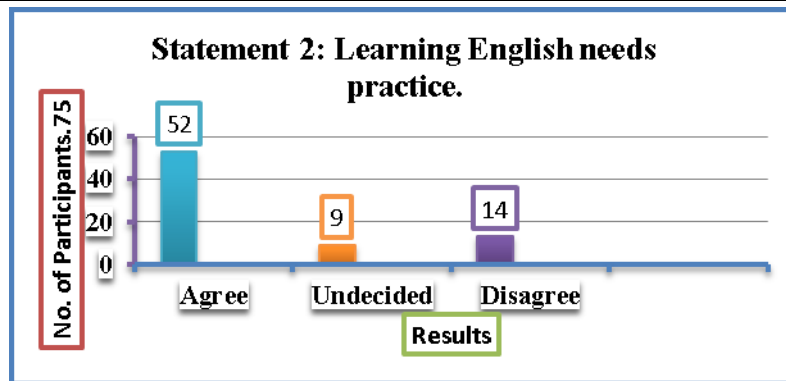


English can open up opportunities for getting better and well-paid jobs as per the below data as around 79% participants-employees believe that English can help them find better jobs.

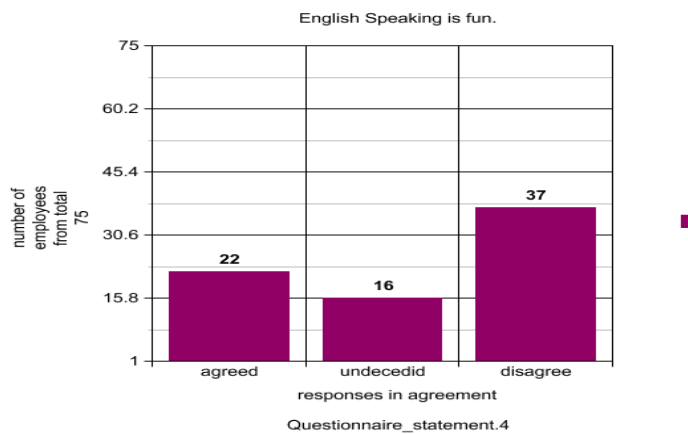


Research question 2: Is English language learning difficult or interesting?

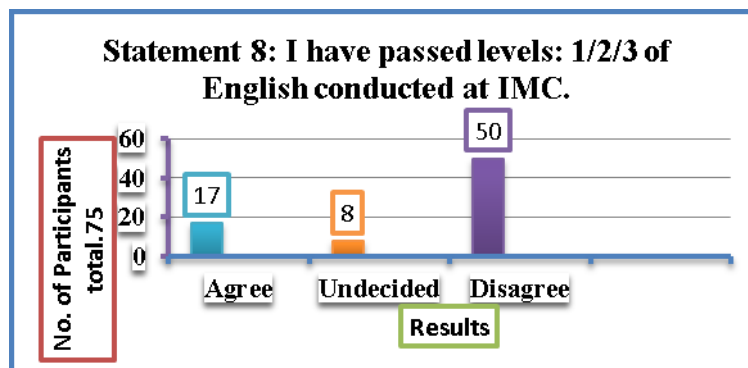
Following data confirm that learning English is both interesting and difficult. However, practice will make the process easier. Around 69 % participants opine that learning English needs practice.



Data on statement 4 reveal that speaking English is fun as stated by only 29.3% respondents. In other words, learning and using is not fun for a good number of employees, therefore, they need opportunities to improve.

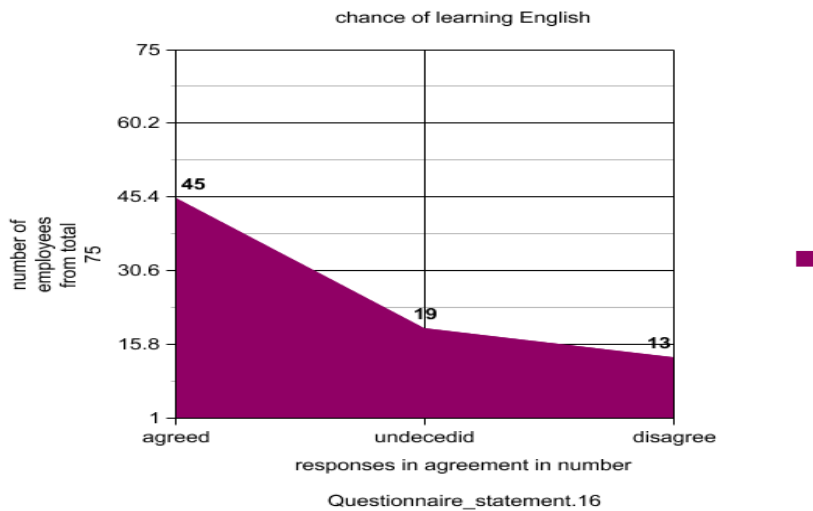


Around 23% employees affirm that confirm that can learn English and improve by training and developmental sessions. Quite some of them have already attended and passed the levels conducted by IMC.

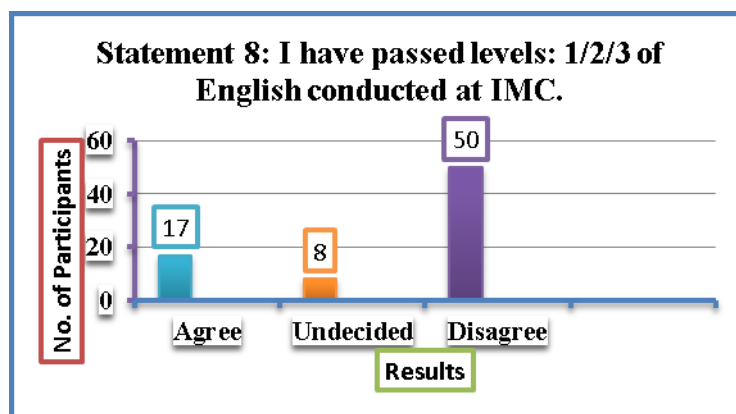


Research question 3: Is the hospital administration cooperative for learning/using English?

The participants' responses (60%) on statement -16 (below) are in agreement that they have chances and opportunities to learn and use English. They are aware of the training/developmental programmes organized from time to time for the employees who need courses in English.

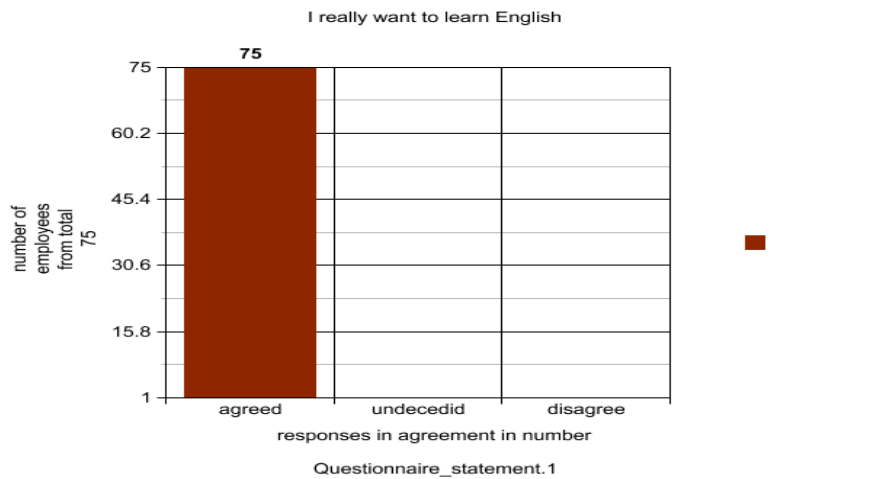


Following data further confirm that IMC has been organizing training courses from time to time.

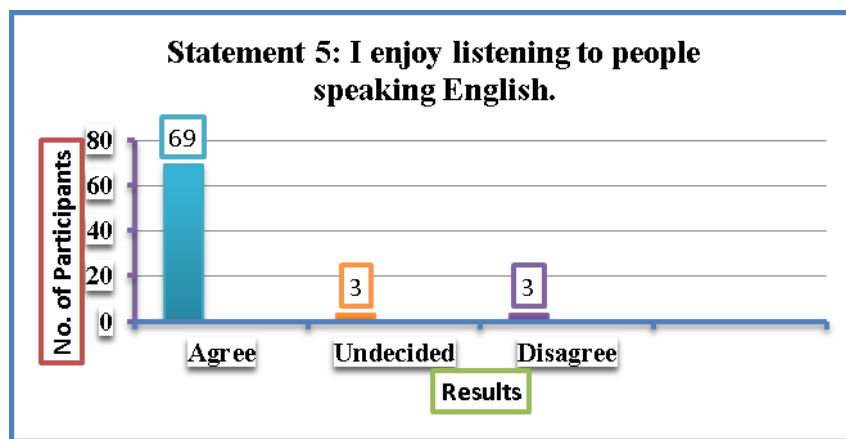


Research question 4: What is the attitude of professionals towards learning English?

Data on statement-1 reveal that 100% participants agree that they want to learn English. That shows the positive attitude of the employees towards learning and using English at IMC and even outside.



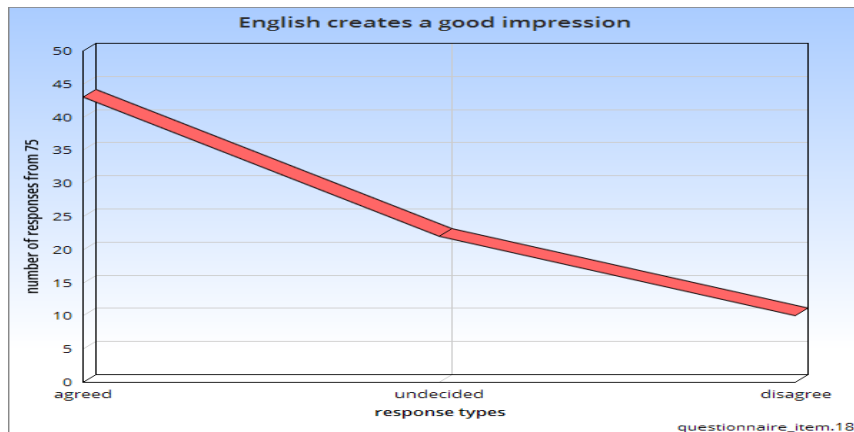
Employees further confirm that they enjoy listening to people speaking English. In other words, English attract most of them.



Employees further added that they need English even for searching information on websites. Today’s society is highly technology based; therefore, most people need an international language to interact with, and later for even business purposes.

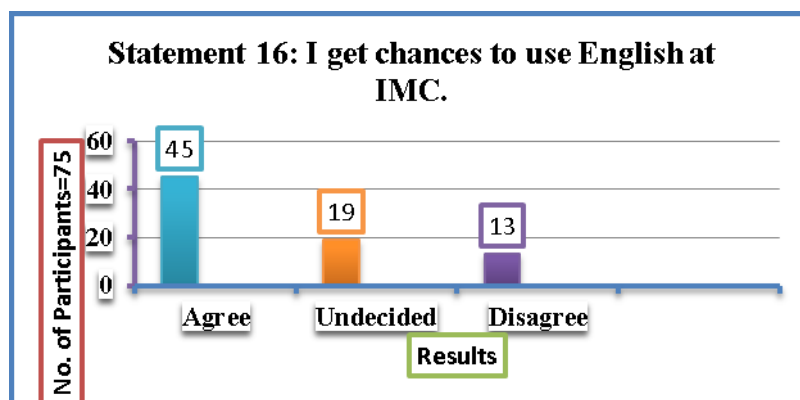


The employees use English in their job specific fields as well as general communication within IMC as according to them, it creates good impression.

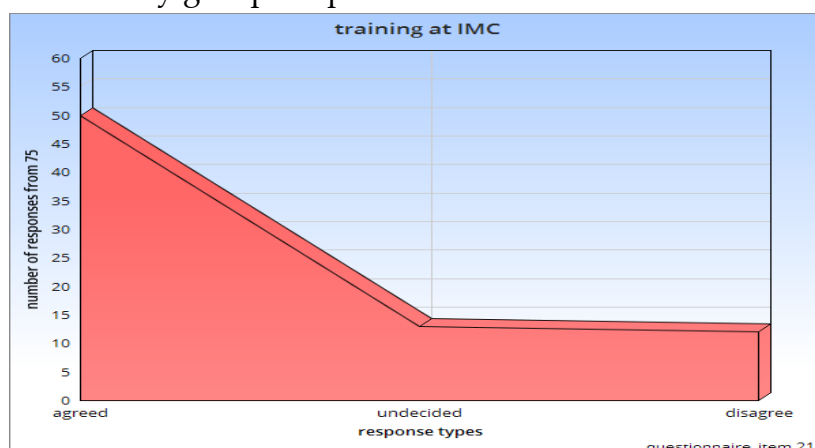


Research question 5: Are the group interested in training programs?

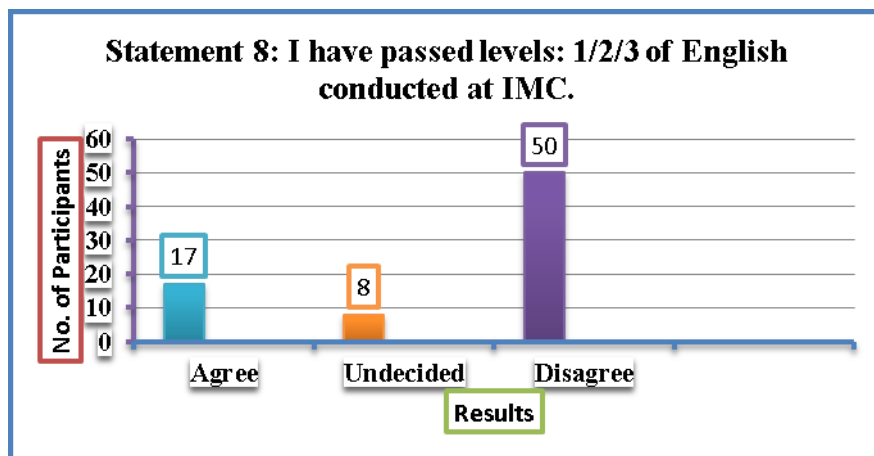
60% employees (see below) affirm that they get chances to use English at their workplace. That proves the organization of training programmes as needed by employees in their concerned areas/job.



Below data further substantiate the fact that the work place arranges training sessions in English for different needy groups of professionals.



Some of them confirm that they have already attended the training sessions organized by the hospital.



6. Limitations of Study

The study included 75 staff members only. The validity of the questionnaire can be a technical issue, however content validity was tested. In addition, the results are context-specific to a great extent. There are, of course, many other kinds of hospitals and different groups of professionals which could not be specifically dealt with. Some hospitals don't focus English much, so there is a need to explore this aspect too.

7. Conclusion

Employees generally have positive attitude towards learning/using English for their specific jobs as well as general communication. Although for some of them, it won't be an easy task as they are quite senior, and less exposed to the target language. Yet for most of them, learning English seems interesting and a fun experience. It attracts most of them for specific reasons. It has been noted that based on the need analysis, the hospital organizes training sessions quite frequently to improve the English language proficiency among staff, and the sessions have been very successful and well received by the professionals.

8. Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that not only one hospital but nearly all the hospitals and health care centres should cater to the English language needs of the employees

who could be mainly a Saudi or even expatriates. Being an important language of medicine, English can't be ignored in health related professions.

9. Suggested Research

Further research can be conducted to compare the perceptions of employees at different types of hospitals. It may also be possible to investigate into the recruitment/promotion policies based on English language proficiency of the perspective candidates.

About the authors

Dr Intakhab Alam Khan (M.A. in English, B. Ed, M. Ed, M. Phil, PhD and D. Lit (Hon) is currently associated with King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-Saudi Arabia. He has almost 24 years of experience in teaching/training/research at various universities. An author of a dozen of academic and research books, and around 70 papers in different national/international online and print journals, Dr Khan has taught General/medical/health/business English in Saudi Arabia. His presentations at international conferences have already been published in ISI indexed proceedings. He is honorary chief editor/associate editor/asst. editor of many online educational journals published worldwide.

Fariha Asif is a teacher trainer, certified mentor, researcher, presenter and an English Language lecturer at King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. She is pursuing her doctoral work at the University of Terengganu, Malaysia. Fariha has presented many papers in different international conferences across the globe. She has been honored with many awards including one-year Leadership Mentoring Program by TESOL Arabia 2017. She is conference ambassador for TACON 2017. Fariha also has the honor to meet Mr. Noam Chomsky, father of modern linguistics in the Congress of Linguists held at Geneva, Switzerland.

References

1. Abd Aziz, M. S. (1994, January). Attitudes Towards Learning English: A Survey of UKM Undergraduates. *Akademika*, 44, 85–99. Retrieved from http://www.ukm.my/penerbit/akademika/jakad_44-05-lock.pdf
2. Abu-Melhim, A.-R. (2009). Attitudes of Jordanian College Students Towards Learning English has a Foreign Language. *College Student Journal*, 43(2), 682–94. Retrieved from

- <http://web.ebscohost.com.wf2dnvr1.webfeat.org/ehost/delivery?hid=12&sid=d12a81f7...>
3. Alfawzan, M. M. (2012). *Saudi Students' Attitudes Towards the Utility of English and Their Willingness to Learn It*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (AAT 1514193).
 4. Al Mamun, A., Raman, M., Mahbuber Rahman, A., & Hossain, A. (2012). Students' Attitudes Towards English: The Case of Life Science School of Khulna University. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(1), 200–209. Retrieved from http://irssh.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/20_IRSSH-264-V3N1.131231435.pdf
 5. Al-Mansour, N. S. (2007). The Effect of Attitude on Foreign Language Acquisition: The learning of Arabic Pronunciation as a Case Study. *Readings: A Bilingual Journal of English Studies*. Retrieved from <http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/al-mansour/default.aspx>
 6. Al Noursi, O. (2013, January). Attitude Towards Learning English: The Case of the UAE
 7. Technological High School. *Educational Research*, 4(1), 21–30. Retrieved from <http://www.interestjournals.org/ER>.
 8. Al-Tamimi, A. & Shuib, M. (2009). Motivation and Attitudes Towards Learning English: A Study of Petroleum Engineering Undergraduates at Hadhramout University Of Sciences and Technology, *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 9(2), 29–53. Retrieved from http://www.ukm.my/ppbl/Gema/abstract%20for%20pp%2029_55.pdf
 9. Baker, C. (1992). *Attitudes and Language*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
 10. Bassyony, M. & Cooper Jr., H. (2012). Teaching in Style: Interaction Patterns in the EFL Classroom. In Rania Jabr (Ed.). *The American University in Cairo Special Issue for the Nile TESOL Conference Proceedings Fall 2012 "Language Education in the 21st Century: Challenges & Opportunities"*, (2), 139–152.
 11. Brennan, M., & Van Naersean, M. (1989). Language and content in ESP. *ELT Journal*, 43(3), 196-205. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/43.3.196>
 12. Buschenhofen, P. (1998). Report: English Language Attitudes of Final-Year High School and First-Year University Students in Papua New Guinea. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 8, 93–116. Retrieved from <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ajelt/vol8/rep2.htm>
 13. Despagne, Colette (2010, January 6). The Difficulties of Learning English: Perceptions and Attitudes in Mexico. *Canadian and International Education /*

- Education Canadienne et Internationale*, 39(2), Article 5, 55–74. Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol39/iss2/5>
14. Harding, K. (2007). *English for Specific Purposes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
15. İnal, S., Evin, İ. & Saracaloğlu, A. S. (2003, October). The Relation between Students' Attitudes Toward Foreign Language and Foreign Language Achievement. Paper presented at Approaches to the Study of Language and Literature, First International Conference Dokuz Eylül University Buca Faculty of Education, İzmir, Turkey. Retrieved from <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/27/754/9618.pdf>
16. Khan, Intakhab A.(2016). Difficulties in Mastering and Using English for Specific Purpose (Medical Vocabulary): A Linguistic Analysis of Working Saudi Hospital Professionals. *International Journal of Education*, Vol. 8, No. 1
<http://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/ije/article/viewFile/9163/7460>
17. Psaltou-Joycey, A. & Sougari, A-M. (2010). Greek Young Learners' Perceptions about Foreign Language Learning and Teaching. *Advances in Research on Language Acquisition and Teaching: Selected Papers*, 387– 401. Retrieved from <http://www.enl.auth.gr/gala/14th/Papers/English%20papers/Psaltou&Sougari.pdf>
18. Robinson, N. (2009). Vocabulary in ESP: Ideas for Bridging the 'Information Gap. *Jezikstruke: teorijaipraksa, Zbornikradova*. Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu, 34 – 42.
19. Soku, D., Simpeh, K. N. & Osafo-Adu, M. (2011). Students' Attitudes Towards the Study of English and French in a Private University Setting in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 2(9), 19–30. Retrieved from www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/download/.../677
20. Sykes, J.B. (Ed.). (1964). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. (7th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Thornton, J. G. (2009). *Learning English as a Second Language in South Korea: Perceptions of 2nd Year College and University Students and Their English Speaking Instructors* (Master's Thesis, The University of Southern Queensland, Australia). Retrieved from www.asian-efl-journal.com/Thesis/Thesis-Thornton.pdf
22. Zainol Abidin, M. J. (2012). EFL Students' Attitudes Towards Learning English Language: The Case of Libyan Secondary School Students, *Asian Social Science*, 8(2) 119–134. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/view/14617>

Appendix A: Questionnaire for professionals

Dear Participant,

My name is Dr. I. A. Khan, and I am conducting a research with a colleague of mine from King Abdulaziz University. The research is related to the issues of learning/using English at IMC. Therefore, your participation in the survey will be highly important and appreciated. There is no compensation for your responses nor is there any known risk factor. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name if you are doubtful. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. Completion and timely return of the questionnaire will indicate your willingness to participate in the survey/study.

Thanks and regards!

Request for other Information (optional):

Name (optional): Mr/Miss/Mrs/Mis:

Age:

Total Experience (in years):

Experience at IMC:

Experience outside IMC:

Department/unit/section:

Contact no. / email (optional):

Thank you!

Questionnaire

S/n	Statements	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Learning & Using English - General				
1	I really want to learn English.			
2	Learning English needs practice.			
3	I dislike English, but I have to learn it.			
4	Speaking English is fun.			
5	I enjoy listening to people speaking English.			
6	Using English is a status symbol.			
7	I need English when I search on the websites.			
8	I have passed levels: 1/2/3 of English.			
The Importance of English - For the Future & Work				
9	Learning English is important for my future.			
10	Learning English is essential for my future career.			
11	English can help me find better jobs.			
12	By learning English, I can be promoted.			
13	I need English to pass the Saudi Council exam.			
14	English is important in all other hospitals.			
Learning & Using English at IMC				
15	English is very important at IMC.			
16	I get chances to use English at IMC.			
17	I only learn English because managers like it at IMC.			
18	Using English creates a good impression at IMC.			
19	I need English when I work at IMC.			
20	I can't do my work without English.			
Training in English at IMC				
21	IMC provides training in English in our fields.			
22	IMC does long-term training for English development.			
23	The timings of the English courses are suitable.			
24	The trainer(s) of English courses is/are good.			
25	Any other comments: please feel free to write overleaf if u need more space: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of English Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).