English Communicative Competence in Saudi Workplace: Overcoming Barriers and Leveraging Opportunities

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Abstract

English proficiency is a critical driver of professional success in Saudi Arabia, where it functions as a lingua franca in multinational corporations and private enterprises. This study examines the English communicative competence of Saudi employees, focusing on challenges, organizational influences, and perceived benefits within the framework of Vision 2030. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the research draws on survey data from 250 participants and semi-structured interviews with 20 professionals across sectors such as finance, healthcare, and technology. The findings reveal significant challenges to English proficiency, including limited exposure to English-speaking environments (41.49%), inadequate training programs (32.26%), and cultural barriers (25.81%). Organizational factors such as language policies (37.5%), training programs (35.0%), and workplace culture (27.5%) also play a pivotal role. Respondents identified career advancement (27.59%), improved job performance (25.86%), professional growth (24.14%), and networking opportunities (22.41%) as key benefits of English proficiency. Statistical analysis demonstrated consistent recognition across these categories, with a mean percentage (M=25.00%) and no statistically significant differences (χ^2 (3) = 1.55, p = 0.670). This study underscores the multifaceted nature of English communicative competence and its implications for professional development in Saudi workplaces. It advocates for tailored training programs, intercultural communication initiatives, and robust language policies to create an enabling environment for English proficiency. These strategies are essential for advancing individual careers and enhancing organizational competitiveness in a globalized economy.

Keywords: English communicative competence, Saudi workforce, language policies, cultural barriers, training programs

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence, first conceptualized by Hymes (1972) as distinct from Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence, has evolved into a multidimensional concept encompassing grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic awareness, strategic communication, and discourse-related abilities (Canale & Swain, 1980). These skills are indispensable in globalized workplaces, where English is the dominant communication medium in multinational corporations, academic institutions, and professional sectors.

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The demand for English proficiency has grown significantly in Saudi Arabia, driven by Vision 2030, which prioritizes economic diversification and workforce globalization.

Vision 2030 highlights the strategic importance of English in fostering international communication, professional mobility, and economic competitiveness. As Saudi businesses increasingly engage with global partners, mastering intercultural communication and adhering to international discourse norms have become essential. English proficiency is not merely a skill but a strategic asset that enhances organizational success and individual career growth, particularly in key sectors such as finance, healthcare, and technology.

Despite the growing importance of English communicative competence in Saudi workplaces, research addressing how socio-cultural and organizational factors influence its development and use remains limited. While prior studies have explored English language education and cross-cultural communication, there has been little focus on the specific challenges Saudi employees face in applying English within professional settings. This gap is significant because of the unique interplay of cultural norms, workplace dynamics, and training practices in shaping language acquisition and usage.

This study adopts a mixed-method approach to address these gaps, integrating quantitative data from 250 survey respondents and qualitative insights from 20 semi-structured interviews conducted across key sectors. By examining the primary challenges to English proficiency, the organizational factors influencing language use, and the perceived benefits of English competence, this research provides actionable insights to enhance English communicative competence in Saudi workplaces.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are Saudi employees' primary challenges in developing and maintaining English communicative competence in the workplace?
2. How do organizational factors—such as language policies, training programs, and workplace culture—affect English acquisition and use in Saudi organizations?
3. What are the perceived benefits of English communicative competence for career advancement, job performance, professional growth, and networking?

The study contributes to the academic understanding of English language use in Saudi workplaces by answering these questions. It offers practical recommendations for aligning language training with broader economic and social objectives, ensuring that language development strategies are integrated into the aspirations of Vision 2030.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English has become a global lingua franca, pivotal in facilitating communication across cultures, enabling international business transactions, and enhancing professional opportunities. This global prominence is particularly significant in Saudi Arabia, where Vision 2030 emphasizes English as a key driver of economic diversification and global competitiveness. While Arabic remains dominant in most social and professional interactions, the growing integration of English into workplaces signals a shift in linguistic practices, reflecting broader globalization trends. Research highlights the

transformative impact of English proficiency on professional success and economic opportunities globally and within Saudi Arabia (Aririguzoh, 2022; Yunhua & Budiman, 2024). However, the path to developing English communicative competence is fraught with challenges shaped by individual, cultural, and organizational factors.

A recurring theme in the literature is the limited exposure to English-speaking environments, significantly hindering language acquisition. The lack of authentic, consistent interactions in English often results in learners feeling unprepared for real-world communication (Krashen, 1982; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). In Saudi Arabia, Arabic's predominance limits employees' opportunities to engage in English outside formal settings, such as client meetings or training programs, reducing their fluency and confidence (Alqahtani, 2018; Alharbi, 2015). Compounding this issue is the inadequacy of traditional language training programs, which frequently emphasize rote memorization and grammatical accuracy over practical communication skills. As noted by Watson Todd (2003) and Pilotti et al. (2021), such approaches fail to equip learners with the tools necessary for effective workplace interactions. Training programs in Saudi Arabia often neglect job-specific vocabulary and real-life scenarios, leaving employees ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of professional communication (Alshayban, 2022).

Cultural dynamics present additional barriers to achieving English communicative competence. Saudi Arabia's high-context communication norms, which prioritize indirectness and deference, can conflict with the direct communication style often associated with English (Alptekin, 2002; Ahmad et al., 2023). This cultural tension makes employees hesitate to use English confidently, particularly in hierarchical or sensitive professional contexts. Albelihi (2023) underscores the importance of integrating intercultural communication training into language programs to address these cultural barriers, enabling employees to adapt to new linguistic expectations while maintaining cultural authenticity.

While challenges to English proficiency are well-documented, organizational factors also play a critical role in shaping language development. Research highlights that workplace++++ with formal language policies mandating English as the primary communication medium report higher employee proficiency levels (Ehrenreich, 2010; Kim, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, however, such policies are often inconsistently enforced, with insufficient support for practical language use, such as regular speaking sessions or accessible resources (Jabeen, 2023). As Farooqui et al. (2023) suggested, comprehensive language policies must integrate active language practices to create an environment conducive to ongoing language development. Training programs, when designed to address industry-specific needs, are similarly impactful. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies, which emphasize real-world application through role-playing and interactive exercises, have significantly enhanced language acquisition (Belcher, 2006; Alharbi, 2015). In Saudi contexts, such approaches are particularly valuable in addressing workplace communication challenges, as they align with employees' professional needs and tasks (Alshayban, 2022).

Workplace culture further influences English communicative competence. A multilingual environment that encourages the consistent use of English in formal and informal

settings fosters greater engagement and proficiency (Nickerson, 2005; Doughty & Long, 2003). However, in Saudi Arabia, cultural preferences for Arabic in informal interactions can restrict opportunities for English practice, limiting employees' language development (Alhamami, 2019). Striking a balance between promoting English and respecting cultural norms is essential for creating an inclusive workplace that supports linguistic growth.

The professional benefits of English proficiency are well-established, encompassing career advancement, improved job performance, professional growth, and expanded networking opportunities. Studies consistently link English competence to better job prospects, higher salaries, and leadership opportunities, particularly in multinational settings (Graddol, 2010; Akther, 2022; Kawsar, 2023). For Saudi employees, strong English skills enable access to competitive healthcare, technology, and finance positions and enhance job satisfaction (Alghamdi, 2024). Regarding job performance, English proficiency facilitates seamless collaboration within diverse teams, reduces misunderstandings, and enhances efficiency (Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Sarwari et al., 2024). Additionally, employees who are proficient in English can more effectively engage with international clients and partners, contributing to organizational productivity and success (Ocampo et al., 2022).

Networking represents another critical benefit of English proficiency, allowing professionals to build meaningful connections and participate in global collaborations. Studies emphasize that English is often the primary language of communication in international conferences, workshops, and events, providing professionals with unique opportunities to expand their networks (English et al., 2021). In Saudi Arabia, employees with advanced English skills are better positioned to engage with industry leaders and international peers, creating pathways for professional development (Alharbi & Ahmad, 2022).

Despite the wealth of research highlighting the challenges, organizational influences, and benefits of English proficiency, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these factors interact within Saudi workplaces. Specifically, limited attention has been paid to the unique socio-cultural and organizational dynamics that shape employees' ability to acquire and sustain English communicative competence. This study seeks to address this gap, providing insights that inform academic literature and practical applications aligned with Vision 2030's goals.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

A mixed-method approach, using surveys and semi-structured interviews, was chosen to address the research questions thoroughly. This design was selected for its ability to provide a comprehensive exploration of English communicative competence in Saudi workplaces, combining the quantitative reach of surveys with the qualitative depth of interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the topic by capturing broad trends and detailed personal experiences.

The survey instrument was carefully developed to gather quantitative data on participants' perceptions of challenges in developing and maintaining English communicative competence, the impact of organizational factors on English proficiency, and the perceived benefits of English proficiency in a professional setting. The survey was based on existing validated instruments and adapted to suit the study's context. It included Likert-scale questions targeting key constructs such as the accessibility of English language environments, the quality of language training programs, and the influence of cultural factors on language acquisition. For example, participants were asked, "To what extent do you believe the prevalent use of English in the workplace contributes to improving employees' language skills?" This question was rated on a scale of 1 to 10, allowing participants to express varying degrees of experience and attitudes toward English communicative challenges.

PILOT TESTING

A pilot test was conducted prior to full-scale data collection to ensure the reliability and validity of the survey and interview questions. The pilot involved 20 participants drawn from the target industries (finance, healthcare, and technology), representing a range of roles and English proficiency levels. Participants provided feedback on the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the questions. Based on this feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve question-wording, reduce ambiguity, and ensure cultural appropriateness. For example, a question initially perceived as too vague—"How does English proficiency impact your career?"—was revised to include specific prompts, such as "Consider its influence on promotions or salary."

The pilot also established the instrument's internal consistency, which was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha for survey items measuring similar constructs. A reliability coefficient of 0.85 was achieved, indicating strong reliability. Face validity was ensured through expert reviews by linguistics and workplace communication specialists, who confirmed the survey's alignment with the study's objectives. The interview guide was similarly refined during the pilot, with questions tested for coherence and logical flow.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling from key industries such as finance, healthcare, and technology across Saudi Arabia (Guest et al., 2006). This method ensured representation from sectors particularly relevant to the study's focus, contributing to a dataset that reflects the broader workforce's experiences. Approximately 600 employees were invited to participate in the survey. This resulted in 250 completed responses (160 males and 90 females) across different job roles, from entry-level to senior management, and varying English proficiency levels. This breadth of participants provided a comprehensive view of experiences, insights, and perspectives on English communicative competence within Saudi workplaces, which are vital for understanding contextual influences on English proficiency. The response rate was approximately 41.7%, indicating a reasonable level of engagement.

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected subset of 20 survey respondents. Interview participants were chosen based on their responses to specific survey items and their diversity in industry, proficiency level, and

organizational roles. The interviews were structured around key themes, including employee challenges, organizational support mechanisms, and perceived benefits of English proficiency. Interview questions were developed based on survey findings and were piloted to ensure clarity and relevance. This complementarity allowed for a detailed exploration of individual experiences that enriched the broader survey findings (Miles et al., 2014). The qualitative data from interviews were coded and analyzed thematically to identify patterns and insights.

Data collection occurred over two months. Surveys were distributed electronically, facilitating easy access and completion across varied geographic locations. Interviews were conducted in person or via secure video conferencing based on participants' preferences and locations, enhancing participation flexibility. Ethical considerations were a priority, with strict measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, including anonymized data storage procedures. Participation in the survey and interview phases was voluntary, fostering an environment conducive to honest, reflective feedback. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

Age, gender, and educational levels were intentionally excluded from the scope of the study to streamline the analysis and focus on organizational and communicative factors influencing English proficiency. While this approach ensures clarity in addressing the primary research objectives, it limits the exploration of potential intersections between demographic variables and language competence. This limitation is acknowledged, and future studies are encouraged to investigate how demographic characteristics might intersect with organizational dynamics and communicative competence. For instance, exploring whether younger employees adapt more quickly to workplace English than older colleagues or how gender dynamics influence language use in professional settings could offer valuable insights.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process was designed to comprehensively address the research questions, focusing on the multifaceted aspects of English communicative competence in Saudi workplaces. The analysis involved quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a robust understanding of the data.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. This approach facilitated the identification of general patterns and trends across various variables, providing a foundational understanding of participant responses related to challenges, organizational factors, and perceived benefits associated with English communicative competence. Descriptive statistics were particularly useful in summarizing and visualizing the data, allowing for an initial exploration of the relationships between the variables of interest.

In parallel, qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and semi-structured interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. This involved systematically coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns, which were refined into broader categories. The thematic analysis provided rich, contextual insights into participants'

experiences and perceptions, complementing the quantitative findings and offering depth to the understanding of the research questions.

A triangulation approach was employed to integrate the quantitative and qualitative findings. This involved comparing and synthesizing data from both sources to understand the factors influencing English communicative competence comprehensively. The integration of these data types allowed for cross-verification of findings, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of the study.

The combined analysis offered a multidimensional exploration of the research questions, illuminating the challenges, organizational influences, and perceived benefits of English communicative competence. This comprehensive approach ensured that the analysis was aligned with the research objectives, providing a nuanced interpretation of the data and supporting the development of informed targeted interventions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHALLENGES

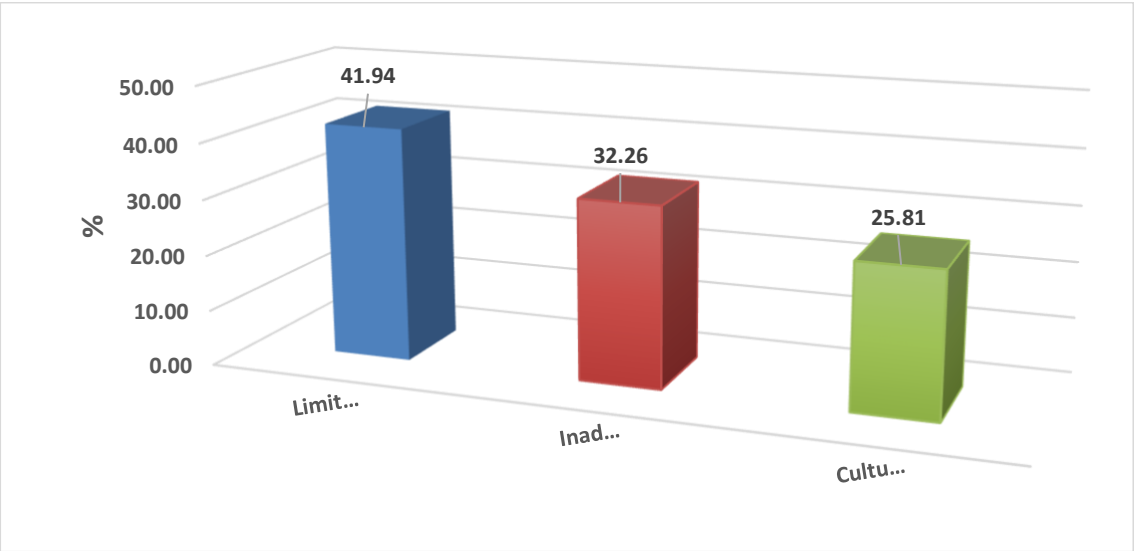Figure 1: Primary Challenges in Developing English Communicative Competence

Figure 1 illustrates the three primary challenges hindering Saudi employees from developing and sustaining English communicative competence: limited exposure to English-speaking environments **(**41.49%**)**, inadequate language training programs **(**32.26%**)**, and cultural barriers to effective communication **(**25.81%**)**. As elaborated below, these challenges align with global research and are deeply rooted in the Saudi context.

A series of statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the impact of these challenges. The mean percentage of the identified challenges (33.19%) serves as a baseline for comparison. The standard deviation (7.88%) indicates moderate variability, suggesting that while limited exposure is the most dominant challenge, the others are also significant and warrant attention. To examine the relative impact, a percentage difference analysis revealed disparities between limited exposure and inadequate training programs **(**9.23%**)** and between inadequate training programs and cultural barriers **(**6.45%**)**.

A chi-square test was conducted to substantiate these differences, yielding a statistic of χ^2 (2) = 9.22 and a p-value of 0.0099, confirming that the differences among the three challenges are statistically significant. This result underscores the necessity of targeted interventions, prioritizing addressing limited exposure, followed by inadequate language training programs and cultural barriers.

LIMITED EXPOSURE (41.49%)

Limited exposure to English-speaking environments emerged as the most significant challenge, cited by 41.49% of respondents. This finding is consistent with global research, such as Dearden (2014), who emphasizes that confining English use to formal settings impedes natural language retention and fluency. In Saudi Arabia, where Arabic dominates social and professional domains, English use is often restricted to structured contexts, limiting opportunities for authentic language practice (Alharbi, 2015). Alharbi further notes that the prevalence of Arabic in daily interactions diminishes learners' motivation and comfort with spontaneous English use.

Studies by Krashen (1982) and Lightbown and Spada (2013) underline the importance of consistent, immersive interactions in fostering communicative competence. Similarly, Saudi-based research, including Alqahtani (2018) and Elyas and Picard (2018), critiques rote learning methods for leaving learners unprepared for real-world communication. Pilotti et al. (2021) argue that traditional educational approaches, which often prioritize grammatical accuracy, fail to address the practical language skills essential for workplace communication.

Qualitative data reinforces these findings. One participant remarked, "I only speak English during client meetings. The rest of the time, it is all Arabic." Another noted, "I hardly ever use English in daily life. It's frustrating because I want to improve, but there is no chance to practice." A third respondent commented, "I have to wait for business trips to practice English, but those opportunities are rare." One participant succinctly expressed, "I wish I had more chances to practice English outside of work." Such feedback underscores limited immersion in English-speaking environments significantly affects employees' fluency and confidence. These anecdotal accounts align with existing literature and highlight the urgent need for more opportunities for informal English practice within the Saudi professional landscape.

LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The second most significant challenge, cited by 32.26% of respondents, is inadequate language training programs. This finding aligns with critiques by Watson Todd (2003) and Belcher (2006), who argue that programs focused on rote learning and grammar fail to prepare learners for real-world communication. In Saudi Arabia, traditional memorization methods often leave learners ill-equipped to meet workplace language demands (Alharbi, 2015). Furthermore, Pilotti et al. (2021) reinforce this viewpoint, emphasizing that such training methodologies do not adequately prepare learners for the complexities of workplace communication.

Our findings support the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**,** which prioritizes real-life application over grammatical accuracy. Alshayban (2022) advocates for CLT tailored to workplace needs, a view strongly supported by respondents' feedback regarding the necessity of industry-specific language skills. Similarly, Alptekin (2002) suggests incorporating intercultural communication training into language programs to address cultural dynamics, which is essential in Saudi Arabia, where cultural expectations can significantly affect language use (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with current training programs, noting their lack of job-specific and conversational components. One participant remarked, *"After training, I knew more grammar, but I still did not feel prepared to speak English at work."* Another shared, *"The training focused too much on tests and not enough on real conversations."* A third participant stated, *"I learned a lot of vocabulary, but there were no real conversations. It felt pointless."* A fourth interviewee noted, *"I wish the training included role-playing scenarios. That would make it feel more relevant."*

These anecdotal accounts further highlight the gaps in current training programs. One interviewee succinctly explained, *"We need training that helps us speak in the situations we face every day."* The percentage difference of 6.45% between inadequate training programs and cultural barriers emphasizes its relative importance in the broader context of communicative challenges. Addressing these deficiencies through practical, job-specific training aligned with workplace needs and intercultural communication strategies is crucial for equipping employees with the tools they need for effective real-world communication.

CULTURAL BARRIERS

Cultural barriers emerged as the third most significant challenge, cited by 25.81% of respondents. These barriers stem from Saudi Arabia's high-context communication norms, which emphasize indirectness and deference, often clashing with English's direct communication style. This mismatch creates hesitancy and discomfort among learners, aligning with global research highlighting how cultural dynamics shape language learning attitudes and preferences (Ahmad et al., 2023).

One participant reflected, "In Saudi culture, we tend to express opinions indirectly, especially in professional settings. When speaking Arabic, I feel I can express myself fully, but in English, I feel exposed." Another shared, "Sometimes I feel like I am not being myself when I speak English, so I hold back my opinions." These insights highlight the difficulty of reconciling native cultural norms with second-language expectations.

The scarcity of English interactions outside work compounds these challenges. Respondents noted how limited opportunities for natural immersion hinder language acquisition and diminish confidence over time. One participant observed, "If I could practice with friends or family, it would greatly help. However, even my English friends prefer to use Arabic with me." This supports Dearden's (2014) assertion that meaningful language acquisition requires immersion beyond structured environments.

Additionally, interviewees expressed unease with adapting their communication styles to fit English norms, often citing fears of offending others or losing meaning. One

participant explained, "I struggle to be direct in English because I was taught to be indirect," while another noted, "Sometimes I feel like I am not being polite enough when I speak English." These comments underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity in language training programs, as hesitation often arises from conflicting norms.

Scholars such as Alptekin (2002), Ahmad et al. (2023), and Albelihi (2023) advocate for integrating intercultural communication training into language programs. Such initiatives could help Saudi employees navigate cultural differences more effectively, boosting their communicative competence.

The statistical significance of these barriers, as shown by chi-square test results, highlights the need for culturally informed training. These programs should address language acquisition and help learners adapt to English communication norms while maintaining cultural identity. A holistic approach combining practical application, cultural awareness, and consistent immersion aligns with qualitative feedback and existing literature.

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

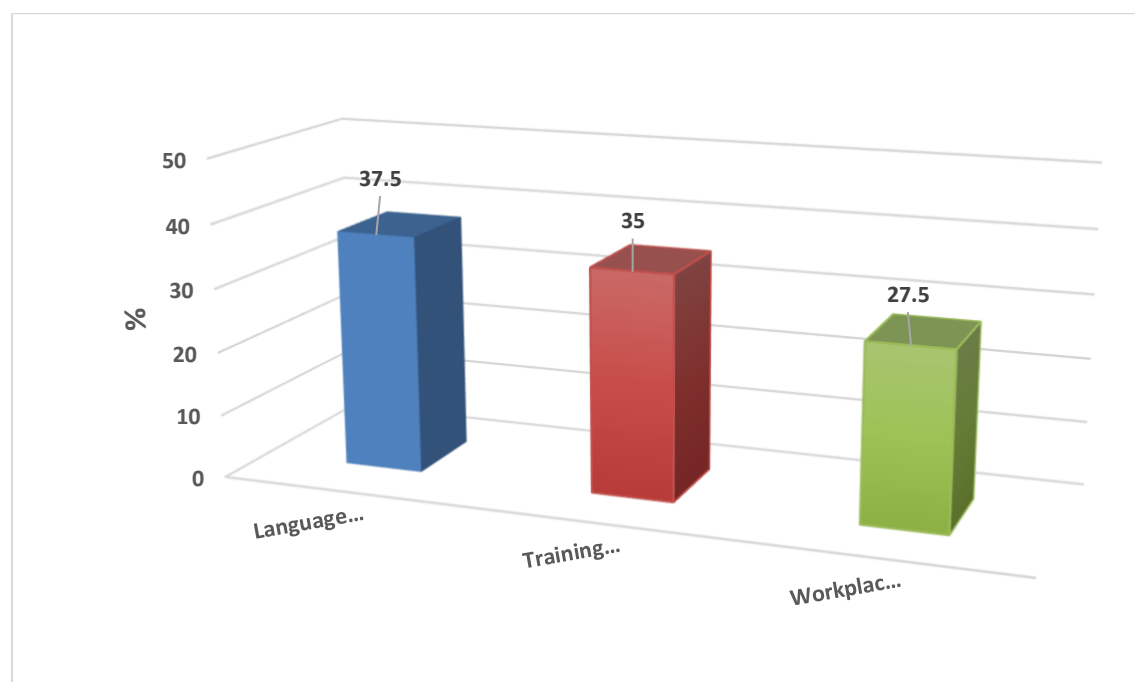**Figure 2:** Organizational Factors Affecting English Communicative Competence

Figure 2 identifies language policies (37.5%), training programs (35.0%), and workplace culture (27.5%) as key organizational factors influencing English communicative competence. These factors align with global research, including insights from Doughty and Long (2003), which emphasize the role of institutional frameworks in shaping language outcomes.

The mean percentage across these factors is 33.33%, with a standard deviation of 5.20%, indicating relatively low variability. Language policies emerge as slightly more influential, followed by training programs and workplace culture. A percentage difference analysis revealed a 2.5% difference between language policies and training

programs and a 7.5% difference between training programs and workplace culture. This ranking highlights the varying levels of impact each factor has on English communicative competence, although the differences are not statistically significant.

To statistically substantiate these observations, a chi-square test (χ^2 (2) = 4.07, p = 0.131) confirmed that these factors' differences are insignificant. These results underscore the necessity of a balanced approach to enhancing English communicative competence in organizational settings. While language policies hold a slightly more significant influence, training programs and workplace culture also contribute meaningfully, making all three factors critical to address collectively for optimal results.

LANGUAGE POLICIES

Formal workplace language policies, highlighted by 37.5% of respondents, are critical in promoting English proficiency. Research by Ehrenreich (2010) and Kim (2015) demonstrates that enforcing English in multinational workplaces fosters language development. Similarly, Neeley (2013) highlights how language policies help employees navigate daily communication tasks more efficiently. In countries such as Japan and South Korea, organizations mandating English as the primary language of communication report higher employee proficiency levels (Kim, 2015). These findings align with our study, as reflected in Figure 2, where respondents identified language policies as pivotal in shaping English proficiency.

Organizational frameworks also significantly influence language outcomes. Research by Poncini (2003) and Nickerson (2005) shows that workplaces that foster a multilingual environment, especially by emphasizing English, enhance language engagement and professional integration. In Saudi Arabia, this dynamic is echoed in Jabeen's (2023) findings, which point to structural challenges such as insufficient training for EFL teachers and curricula that lack communicative focus. Furthermore, English often serves as a lingua franca in diverse workplaces, facilitating communication among employees from varied linguistic backgrounds, a notion supported by Tan (2024) and Ahmad and Kadous (2016).

Interviewees consistently emphasized the impact of language policies in fostering English proficiency. Many described how formal policies requiring English in meetings and official communications create a structured environment conducive to language use. One interviewee shared, "In our weekly meetings, we are required to present in English. At first, I struggled, but now I feel more confident speaking in front of my colleagues." This reflects Farooqui et al.'s (2023) findings, highlighting that designating English as the primary language leads to improved proficiency.

However, respondents also noted inconsistencies in policy enforcement and limited support for ongoing language development. One participant remarked, "The policy is there, but no one follows it." Another elaborated, "While our company has a language policy, it often feels like a formality. We need more workshops or training sessions to improve our skills." These sentiments align with Doughty and Long's (2003) assertion that practical resources and training opportunities must reinforce effective language policies.

Additionally, interviewees expressed concerns about accountability and the ease of reverting to Arabic. One participant noted, "I feel like we are not held accountable for using English, so it is easy to fall back into Arabic." Another observed, "Sometimes I wonder if anyone even reads the policy. It does not feel real in our daily work." This underscores the gap between policy design and its practical application in daily organizational practices.

To address these shortcomings, respondents suggested implementing mentorship programs where proficient English speakers could guide less confident colleagues. Such initiatives would provide practical language use and contextual feedback opportunities, bridging the gap between policy and practice. As one participant proposed, "If we had mentors to guide us during presentations or meetings, it would make the policy more effective."

In conclusion, language policies are vital for shaping Saudi employees' English proficiency. However, inconsistent enforcement and insufficient support often undermine their effectiveness. Targeted initiatives, such as mentorship programs, workshops, and stronger enforcement mechanisms, can foster a more conducive environment for language development, ultimately enhancing communicative competence in professional settings.

TRAINING PROGRAMS

Training programs, reported as impactful by 35.0% of respondents, require industry-specific customization to meet workplace demands. Respondents highlighted the need for practical training scenarios, with one participant remarking, "We need training that reflects our actual job tasks." This aligns with global research emphasizing the importance of tailoring training programs to include industry-specific vocabulary, professional writing, and communicative tasks directly aligned with employees' roles, as noted by Belcher (2006) and Watson Todd (2003).

In the Saudi context, generic training courses often fail to equip employees with the technical communication skills necessary for various industries (Al-Harbi, 2015). Interview findings revealed mixed perceptions of existing programs. While some participants acknowledged their value, many identified significant gaps, particularly the reliance on rote memorization and grammar drills at the expense of practical communication skills and real-world applications. One participant explained, "Although we learned many grammar rules, we rarely had opportunities to practice speaking in real-life situations." Another added, "The training was too focused on tests. We need to practice speaking more." A third observed, "I learned a lot of vocabulary, but there were no real conversations. It felt pointless."

These sentiments align with critiques advocating for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies over traditional approaches (Alharbi, 2024). Interviewers stressed the importance of incorporating industry-specific vocabulary and role-relevant scenarios into training programs to enhance their practical value. One participant noted, "The training needs to include real-world tasks, like writing emails or handling client meetings, that we encounter at work."

Additionally, respondents suggested integrating structured support systems into workplace policies to facilitate consistent language exposure and skill application. Examples included designated English-speaking days, mandatory English-speaking sessions, and access to language resources. Such initiatives could provide employees with regular opportunities to apply and refine their language skills in a supportive environment.

To ensure training programs remain relevant and practical, interviewees emphasized the need for ongoing feedback mechanisms to guide program development. Tailored training initiatives beyond generic English instruction were frequently recommended, particularly for roles requiring technical or sector-specific communication skills. This approach would better equip employees for professional demands while fostering long-term language competency.

Some participants also called for creating a workplace culture that consistently integrates English while respecting cultural preferences. They proposed initiatives encouraging English use in formal and informal settings, balanced with appropriate opportunities for expression in Arabic. One participant remarked, "We need a culture where English is used naturally, but it should also feel inclusive for those still learning."

These findings stress the need for a comprehensive approach to language training within Saudi organizations. By focusing on program customization, structured organizational support, and workplace culture, organizations can better address the challenges of English language competency. Practical, communicative approaches, such as those offered by CLT methodologies, can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, ultimately enhancing communication efficiency and fostering a more inclusive professional environment.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

27.5% of respondents cited workplace culture influencing employees' comfort and consistency in English. This finding aligns with global research, highlighting the role of multilingual workplace environments, particularly those incorporating English consistently, in fostering language engagement and proficiency (Nickerson, 2005; Doughty & Long, 2003). In diverse and international settings, English often functions as a lingua franca, facilitating cross-linguistic communication and creating authentic opportunities for language practice.

In Saudi, while English is increasingly embraced in professional environments, Arabic remains the preferred language for informal or culturally sensitive interactions (Alhamami, 2019). Interviewees reflected this duality. One participant shared, "Using English daily in meetings has helped me improve. I feel more confident speaking up now." Another echoed this sentiment: "When my team switched to English for discussions, I felt encouraged to participate more." However, some respondents noted challenges stemming from the dominance of Arabic in informal interactions. One remarked, "I enjoy using English, but I wish more colleagues would join in. It would make it easier."

Cultural dynamics also influenced how English was used in the workplace, particularly in hierarchical relationships and formal settings. Participants highlighted that indirect

communication styles, common in Saudi culture, sometimes hindered open expression in English. One interviewee explained, "I often hesitate to express my opinions directly in meetings. Our culture teaches us to be indirect, especially when speaking to superiors." Another added, "It is challenging to speak up in English when I am unsure how my words will be received." These reflections underscore the need for sensitivity to cultural norms within English-speaking environments, emphasizing the importance of a supportive workplace culture that respects linguistic and cultural nuances.
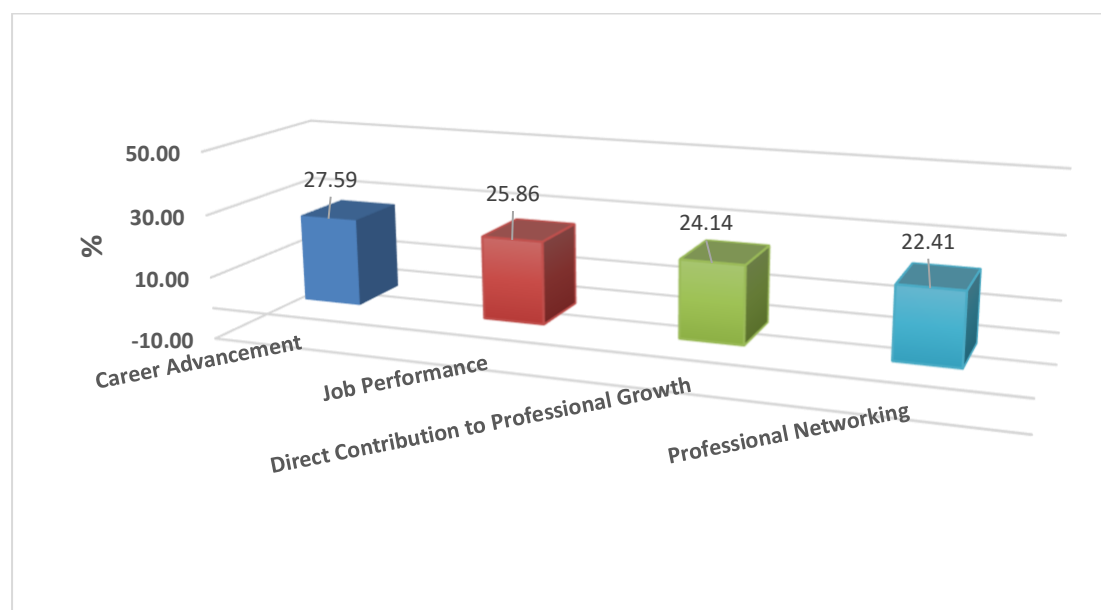
Despite these challenges, an English-oriented workplace culture offers significant opportunities for language skill development. Participants consistently observed that environments promoting regular use of English—such as in meetings or team discussions—boosted their confidence and participation. At the same time, respondents emphasized the importance of balance. Recognizing cultural preferences for Arabic in specific contexts can help foster an inclusive environment that supports language development while honoring cultural practices.

These findings suggest that cultivating a workplace culture that integrates English while respecting cultural norms can enhance communicative competence. A balanced approach, which combines English-speaking practices with sensitivity to hierarchical and cultural dynamics, is key to creating a supportive and effective language environment in Saudi organizations.

PERCEIVED BENEFITS

Figure 3 illustrates the multifaceted perceived benefits of English communicative competence among Saudi employees. These benefits include career advancement, job performance, direct contribution to professional growth, and networking.

Figure 3: Perceived Benefits of English Communicative Competence

The perceived benefits of English communication skills include career advancement (27.59%), improved job performance (25.86%), professional growth (24.14%), and networking opportunities (22.41%). These areas align with respondents' recognition of

English as a crucial skill for professional success. The mean percentage (M=25.00%) and standard deviation (SD=2.23%) indicate consistent recognition across categories, with career advancement slightly prioritized over other areas.

Statistical analysis further supports these findings. A percentage difference analysis revealed small gaps: 1.73% between career advancement and job performance improvement, 1.72% between job performance improvement and professional growth, and 1.73% between professional growth and networking. These differences highlight the distinct yet interconnected contributions of each area in leveraging English communication skills for professional development.

Career advancement emerged as the most recognized benefit, with 27.59% of respondents identifying it as essential. This finding reflects the increasing role of English in securing promotions and leadership roles in globalized workplaces. Improved job performance followed at 25.86%, emphasizing how English proficiency enhances task execution and workplace interactions. Professional growth, reported by 24.14% of respondents, underscores the importance of English in accessing training opportunities, certifications, and continuous learning. Finally, networking opportunities (22.41%) highlight the role of English in building professional connections and expanding career prospects.

A chi-square test (χ^2 (3) = 1.55, p = 0.670) confirmed that the differences among these benefits are not statistically significant, suggesting that respondents value all four areas similarly. This lack of statistical significance emphasizes the need for a balanced approach to leveraging English communication skills across these areas to maximize professional development.

These findings underline the comprehensive impact of English proficiency on career success. By addressing career advancement, job performance, professional growth, and networking opportunities collectively, individuals and organizations can more effectively harness the benefits of strong English communication skills in the professional domain.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT

English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a gateway to career advancement, especially in multinational and global workplaces. Global research consistently highlights that employees with strong English skills have access to better job prospects, higher salaries, and enhanced opportunities for promotion (Graddol, 2010; Nickerson, 2005). In Saudi Arabia, 27.59% of respondents in this study affirmed the critical role of English competence in their professional development. This aligns with the findings by Alharbi and Ahmad (2022), who associate English skills with competitive job opportunities and leadership roles. Similarly, Alghamdi (2024) connects English proficiency with greater job satisfaction and higher salaries, a link also emphasized by Mayor (2024).

Interviews with Saudi participants reinforced this connection, with many sharing personal experiences about how English skills have directly impacted their career trajectories. One participant remarked, "Once I could communicate confidently in English, I was given the chance to lead a project with a global client, which resulted in a promotion." Another stated, "After improving my English, I applied for a higher position

and got it. I know my language skills made a difference." A third interviewee shared, "My manager told me that my ability to speak English opened up new opportunities for me."

These accounts align with the quantitative findings, where 27.59% of respondents identified career advancement as a key benefit of English proficiency. The mean percentage across all perceived benefits (M=25.00%) and a standard deviation (SD=2.23%) confirm consistent recognition of career advancement as the most impactful benefit among the categories analyzed. The chi-square test results (χ^2 (3) = 1.55, p = 0.670) indicate that while career advancement is slightly more recognized, the differences among the perceived benefits are not statistically significant.

These insights emphasize that organizations prioritizing English proficiency can significantly enhance their employees' career advancement opportunities. This benefits individuals by improving their job prospects and professional growth while strengthening the organization's global capabilities.

JOB PERFORMANCE

As illustrated in Figure 3, 25.86% of respondents recognized a positive relationship between English proficiency and job performance. This finding aligns with broader research, underscoring how English competence facilitates seamless communication within diverse teams, enhancing task efficiency (Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Sarwari et al., 2024). Consistent with this view, Agustina et al. (2024) correlate English proficiency with improved workplace performance, noting its role in minimizing misunderstandings and fostering clear communication in globalized settings. Similarly, Ocampo et al. (2022) link English proficiency to greater productivity and adaptability in multinational contexts, while Al-Wossabi (2024) and Alkhoarif (2024) emphasize the necessity for effective collaboration in linguistically diverse environments.

Interviews with Saudi professionals further reinforced this connection, with participants frequently attributing improved job performance to their English language skills. One project manager shared, "When I improved my English, I could collaborate directly with our overseas partners without needing a translator. This saved time and increased my engagement with the project." Another marketing specialist described leading an international campaign, saying, "My English skills allowed me to pitch ideas and respond to real-time feedback during video calls. This direct communication strengthened the project's outcome and fostered camaraderie, making us feel more like partners than just colleagues." Such accounts illustrate how English proficiency empowers employees to manage tasks confidently and collaborate effectively with colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

The findings also align with quantitative results, where 25.86% of respondents ranked improved job performance as a key benefit of English proficiency. The mean percentage (M=25.00%) and standard deviation (SD=2.23%) across all benefits indicate consistent recognition of job performance as a significant advantage. A chi-square test (χ^2 (3) = 1.55, p = 0.670) confirmed no statistically significant differences among the identified benefits, reinforcing the importance of a balanced approach to fostering English skills for professional growth.

These results suggest that organizations prioritizing English proficiency can enhance job performance and support effective teamwork, particularly in today's globalized workforce. By investing in language development, companies can equip employees to communicate clearly, collaborate seamlessly, and contribute more fully to achieving shared goals.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

As demonstrated in Figure 3, 24.14% of respondents acknowledged a positive relationship between English proficiency and direct professional growth, including promotions and increased responsibilities. This finding aligns with existing research, emphasizing the importance of English language skills in facilitating career development. For instance, Dearden (2014) highlights how language proficiency, particularly in English, enhances effective communication and collaborative abilities that are pivotal for career advancement. Similarly, Yadav (2024) notes that English proficiency enables more dynamic participation in professional learning and development activities, thereby fostering growth opportunities.

In the Saudi context, these findings are consistent with Alharbi and Ahmad (2022), who identified English proficiency as essential for engaging in international business and accessing higher positions and leadership roles. Alghamdi (2024) further associates strong English communication skills with expanded opportunities for professional development, reinforcing the integral role of English proficiency in career progression.

Interviews with 20 Saudi professionals further validated this connection, with participants frequently attributing their career growth to enhanced English skills. One employee shared, "When I could finally express my ideas in English during meetings, my manager recognized my contributions, which led to my advancement." Another participant, who recently assumed a leadership role, explained, "I was given more responsibilities after I improved my English. It showed my commitment and made me more visible to my superiors." A third interviewee remarked, "My English skills have helped me take on leadership roles in projects," while a fourth added, "I feel more prepared for challenges at work because I can communicate well in English."

The quantitative findings align with these qualitative insights, with 24.14% of respondents ranking professional growth as a key benefit of English proficiency. The mean percentage (M=25.00%) and standard deviation (SD=2.23%) across all perceived benefits indicate consistent recognition of professional growth as a significant advantage. A chi-square test ($\chi^2(3) = 1.55$, p = 0.670) confirmed no statistically significant differences among the identified benefits, underscoring the balanced importance of career advancement, job performance, professional growth, and networking opportunities.

These results emphasize English proficiency's critical role in fostering professional growth and advancement in the Saudi workplace. By investing in language development initiatives, organizations can empower employees to take on more responsibilities, access leadership roles, and navigate professional challenges confidently, ultimately enhancing individual and organizational success.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING

Our study found that 22.41% of respondents strongly agreed on the positive relationship between English proficiency and professional networking. This finding aligns with broader research emphasizing the importance of English communication skills in enhancing networking opportunities. Studies such as English et al. (2021) demonstrate how English proficiency enables professionals to build connections and collaborate effectively across diverse environments. Similarly, Alghamdi (2024) underscores that individuals with advanced English skills are better equipped to establish valuable professional relationships, expanding their networks in international and business contexts.

Feedback from interviews with 20 Saudi professionals reinforces these findings. Every participant highlighted the advantages of English proficiency in their networking experiences, sharing personal accounts of its impact on their professional connections. One employee remarked, "Speaking English has helped me meet important people in my field." Another shared how attending an English-speaking event allowed him to connect with a mentor, which "changed my career path." Similarly, a third participant explained, "Networking in English has opened up many opportunities for collaboration and learning." A fourth interviewee emphasized, "Most conferences are in English, and speaking the language allows me to engage with speakers and other attendees."

These accounts underscore the value of English as a medium for networking and relationship-building in the global workplace. Many interviewees highlighted how their English proficiency enabled them to connect with industry leaders and engage in meaningful discussions, ultimately expanding their professional networks. One interviewee summarized this benefit: "Fluent English has allowed me to connect with colleagues from different countries. It is not just about getting the job done but about fostering relationships that can lead to future opportunities."

The quantitative findings complement these qualitative insights, with 22.41% of respondents ranking networking opportunities as a key benefit of English proficiency. The mean percentage (M=25.00%) and standard deviation (SD=2.23%) across all perceived benefits indicate consistent recognition of networking as an essential aspect of English proficiency. A chi-square test (χ^2 (3) = 1.55, p = 0.670) confirmed no statistically significant differences among the identified benefits, highlighting the balanced importance of career advancement, job performance, professional growth, and networking opportunities.

In conclusion, enhancing English proficiency is crucial for professionals seeking to leverage networking opportunities in today's interconnected world. By supporting language development, organizations can foster an environment that encourages meaningful professional connections, benefiting individuals and the institution.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the intricate challenges Saudi employees face in developing and sustaining English communicative competence, offering insights into workplace barriers,

organizational factors, and the perceived benefits of English proficiency. The findings highlighted three critical areas: the primary challenges in acquiring English skills, organizational influences on language acquisition, and the advantages of English proficiency for career advancement, job performance, professional growth, and networking.

Saudi employees face several interconnected challenges in their pursuit of English proficiency. Among these, limited exposure to English-speaking environments emerged as the most significant, reported by 41.49% of respondents. The predominance of Arabic in social and professional contexts restricts daily opportunities for using English, significantly hindering fluency. Respondents expressed frustration over the scarcity of immersive experiences, emphasizing the urgent need for informal avenues to practice and maintain their English skills. This finding underscores the necessity of creating opportunities for employees to engage in natural, consistent English communication beyond formal settings.

Inadequate language training programs, identified by 32.26% of respondents, represent another critical obstacle. Many current programs emphasize rote learning and grammatical precision at the expense of practical communication skills, leaving employees unprepared for real-world interactions. Respondents voiced a strong desire for training initiatives tailored to the specific language demands of various industries. Programs incorporating practical application, such as role-playing and task-based exercises, could bridge this gap, equipping employees with the tools needed for effective communication in their professional contexts.

Cultural barriers, cited by 25.81% of respondents, further complicate efforts to enhance English proficiency. High-context communication norms, prevalent in Saudi culture, can undermine confidence in using English, especially in hierarchical or formal settings. Employees often struggle to express themselves directly in English, highlighting the importance of integrating intercultural communication training into language programs. Such training could address these challenges, fostering both confidence and competence in English usage while respecting cultural sensitivities.

The study also examined organizational factors influencing English proficiency. Language policies were identified as the most influential, with 37.5% of respondents acknowledging their impact. However, these policies are often inconsistently enforced and lack comprehensive support, limiting their effectiveness. Establishing formal language policies and ensuring their consistent application could create a more supportive environment for language development. Training programs were also considered impactful by 35% of respondents, underscoring the need for customization to meet the unique demands of different industries. Workplace culture, recognized by 27.5% of respondents, further plays a significant role in shaping English communicative competence. A supportive, multilingual culture can encourage more frequent engagement with English, though cultural dynamics such as hierarchical relationships and indirect communication styles sometimes hinder open dialogue. Cultivating an inclusive culture that promotes English usage while respecting cultural norms could address these barriers.

Respondents also identified the benefits of English proficiency, which include career advancement (27.59%), improved job performance (25.86%), professional growth (24.14%), and networking opportunities (22.41%). The statistical analysis revealed consistent recognition across these categories, with a mean percentage of 25.00% and a standard deviation of 2.23%. A chi-square test (χ^2 (3) = 1.55, p = 0.670) confirmed no statistically significant differences among these benefits, emphasizing their balanced importance. Participants consistently noted how English proficiency contributed to their professional development, enabling them to pursue career growth, enhance performance, and expand their professional networks.

These findings suggest several strategies to enhance English communicative competence in the Saudi workplace. Organizations should prioritize creating informal speaking clubs and designated English-speaking sessions to provide employees with regular opportunities for practice. Tailored training programs should emphasize practical communication skills aligned with industry-specific needs, moving beyond rote memorization to include real-life scenarios and collaborative activities. Intercultural communication training can help employees navigate cultural complexities, boosting their confidence and effectiveness in diverse professional settings.

In addition, establishing and enforcing supportive language policies, alongside providing access to resources such as workshops and digital tools, can significantly aid language development. Mentorship programs, where experienced professionals guide employees in refining their language skills and tackling professional challenges, could further enhance language proficiency.

By implementing these strategies, organizations can foster a supportive environment that improves individual English proficiency and enhances overall organizational success. In today's interconnected global landscape, investing in English communicative competence is essential for unlocking career opportunities, strengthening collaboration, and achieving professional growth.

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