

Needs of English By Graduates of Qatar University in the Workplace

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Abstract

English is undoubtedly the language of international communication. It is generally observed that English is widely used in different sectors in Qatar. The need for English is clear. However, there is no large scale information on the degree and range this need and actual use of English in the workplace in the State of Qatar. In addition, there are no studies, to our knowledge, that investigate this problem in relation to the graduates of the university of Qatar. This paper intends to fill in this gap. It summarizes a field study of the perceived needs of English in workplace by graduates of Qatar University in different fields carried by the Documentation and Humanities Research Centre in 2004. A questionnaire was designed to elicit such information. The sample was randomly selected from different state and private institutions. The data was analyzed using SPSS available on Windows. Various statistical tests were applied including frequencies, percentages, correlations, and ANOVA. The results showed that English language is highly needed for work in both state and private institutions in Qatar. The recommendations made on the basis of the findings of the survey call for a thorough review of the existing ESL courses in the university with an eye on future usability. It is also recommended that English for academic purposes and English for vocational purposes ought to be integrated. This will enhance motivation and promote achievement.

Key words: *English language, Language skills, Need of students*

Introduction

Language needs analysis has grown into a full-fledged approach to syllabus design and language teaching. This approach in its extreme is learner-centered in that the needs are exclusively defined and determined by the learners. In its moderate sense, this approach defines needs with reference to future career expectations and future demands of the job market. Savignon (1997, p.119) stated that "Communicative language teaching begins with an identification of the needs and interests of the learners". This development has gained more momentum with the development of the theory of English for specific purposes (ESP). This simply means tailoring language courses to suit the learners' needs. It is well established that that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs (Maslow, 1970; Norwood, 1996). Therefore, learning is expected to take place when what is learned satisfies the learners' needs. In language teaching, understanding language needs certainly helps in the development of more efficient teaching curricula and methods. This study is a step in this direction. It explores the needs for English by a wide range of employees and the extent these employees use English for work purposes.

The Present Study

The study aims to explore (using quantitative methods) the needs of English in the workplace and to gain insights into Qatar University graduates' needs of English in the workplace. The information and results will be of potential use in a number of areas. Specifically, the study can have the following benefits.

- Support the continuing development of responsive teaching and learning in English.
- Raise general awareness of the employment prospects of Qatar University students.
- Bridge the gap between University English and graduate career opportunities.

- Provides implications for shaping content of English courses to meet graduate employment needs and students expectations.

Research questions

There are seven research questions for this study:

- 1) How do the graduates of the University of Qatar assess their English language proficiency level in each language skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and translation)?
- 2) What are the work fields these graduates usually join?
- 3) How do the demographic variables (e.g. sex, age, schooling, etc.) affect the graduates' EL needs and use in their jobs?
- 4) What EFL skills do most graduates need in their jobs?
- 5) Which language domains are most needed?
- 6) Are there significant correlations between and among the needs for skills?
- 7) How could the EFL courses at the University of Qatar be developed, modified or adapted to cater of the students' future vocational needs?

The Participants

The sample consists of 644 employees who had finished their education in different faculties at the University of Qatar. Within the frame of this investigation, a systematic control of variables related to heterogeneity of the subjects was not feasible. It was not possible, for example, to control for socioeconomic or motivational and affective (psychological) variables or length of exposure in an English speaking environment. All subjects learnt English through specialized ESL instruction. Some of them who finished their higher studies had limited degrees of exposure to English in a host-language environment. From the responses to the questionnaire the researchers were able to notice the following differences among the subjects:

- 1) The participants are spanning a range of variety in age and linguistic competence etc.
- 2) Not all participants followed the same educational programmes.

However, we can assume that they had received the same type of ESL instruction and in general terms the same kind of exposure to English (in their classes). Although the group differs considerably both in language and local culture from English language and culture, the learners' exposure to/familiarity with Western language and culture through the media and other means has probably diminished this gap (i.e. cultural distance, Byram, Esarte – Sarries & Taylor, 1991) considerably.

The Content and Structure of the Data Collection Tool

A questionnaire was designed to collect the data. It consists of 30 questions. The questions divided into 5 parts.

- Background information about the participants, e.g. age, type of school attended, number of years of experience (Qs. 1-12);
- Participants' self-valuation of their level of proficiency in 5 different language skills: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Translation (Qs.13 - 14);
- Needs for each of the above mentioned skills in workplace (Qs. 15- 21);
- Use of each of the above mentioned skills in workplace (Qs. 22- 29);
- Qualitative data (Q. 30).

The Pilot Study

The questionnaire was given to colleagues at the University of Qatar for evaluation. The conformity among the evaluators was 85 percent. Few items were adjusted accordingly.

Administration of the Questionnaire

The participants were contacted by The Centre of Documentation and Humanities Research. A total of 644 questionnaires or approximately 64% of the distributed questionnaires were returned. It should be noted here that there were 658 returned questionnaires but 14 of them were not completed.

Data Analysis

The data was coded and turned into dichotomous and numerical data as appropriate. Background information was transformed into dichotomous data whereas the data on the self-rating of the level of proficiency, needs, and use was transformed into numerical data. The data was then submitted to statistical analysis using SPSS version 11 (Statistical Package for Social Science). The statistical techniques used include frequencies, reliability, analysis of variance, T-tests and Pearson correlation. The analysis was carried out by The Educational Research Centre. In order to have comparisons of needs on the different skills, the scores were computed in percentages. Therefore, all our results are presented in percentages (raw data are presented). Percentages were used because the number of items on the areas investigated were not identical. Standardization of raw scores (i.e. converting raw scores into Z scores) was deemed unnecessary. Since Z scores are for comparisons between different types of tests in the sense that each kind of test measures certain "skills". In our case the data are comparable (without the need for Z scores).

Statistical differences between the variance were mainly ascertained by the use of analysis of variance (ANOVA). Spearman's Correlation was used to find the strength of relationship between needs and use of English in the areas under investigation. The relationship between Proficiency Level and the different skills was also measured. The aim of correlation analysis is to determine the extent to which variation in one variable is linked to variation in the other. T-tests were used to measure the difference between the participants according to the independent factors, e.g. gender, age, nationality, etc.

Results and Discussion

Within this overall results is the fact that participants responses varied on :

- Time dimension: (i.e. variability according to years of experience). Looking at the results we observe a considerable variation of the responses.
- Skills: variability according to the different skills, i.e. Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking.
- Context/ Domain: variability according to the various language domains, i.e. Dealing with Mail, Reports, Research, etc.
- Input : i.e. variability according to different schools. It is hypothesized that some variation among the participants seems to result from type of school attended.

Profile of the Participants

The analysis of the questions on the first part of the questionnaire gave a complete profile of the participants. The valid number of participants is 644 (567 Qatari nationals and 77 non-Qataris). 295 are males and 349 are females. Table 1 shows the number of participants per subject/major.

Table 1: Distribution of the Participants According to their Majors

Major	Number	Valid Percentage
Business and Administration	122	18.9
Humanities	105	16.3
Education	118	18.3
Science	120	18.6
Engineering	47	7.3
Law	32	5

The total number of the participants listed in table 1 is 544, so the remaining 100 participants spread over a variety of majors that would not allow generalization. Only 75 of the entire sample have postgraduate degrees, five of whom hold Ph.D. degrees. Thirty one (31) participants had their postgraduate education in USA and UK. The participants are employed in different jobs. One hundred and thirty (130) are administrators, 42 are accountants, 20 are clerks, 33 are secretaries and 53 are laboratory technicians. The others have miscellaneous jobs.

As regards the question on self assessment of English language proficiency, 38% state that their level of proficiency ranges from weak to average. On the other hand, 61.5% estimate their level to range from good to excellent. The following table manifests the participants' own assessment of their proficiency levels as far as the four language skills are concerned:

Table 2: The Participants' Assessment of their English Proficiency Levels

Level	Reading %	Writing %	Speaking %	Listening %
0 valid	5.4	6.4	5.4	5.9
Poor	5.0	8.7	7.0	7.1
Average	18.2	27.2	23.2	23.1
Good	41.5	41.1	43.6	38.2
Excellent	30.0	16.6	21.0	25.6

- The correlation coefficient (CC) between reading and writing is: 0.85
- The (CC) between speaking and listening is: 0.98
- The (CC) between writing and listening is: 0.93
- The (CC) between reading and listening is: 0.98
- The (CC) between writing and speaking is: 0.93

This simply means that the participants' assessment of their language skills is reliable and statistically highly correlated. It also proves that the four language skills integrate perfectly well and that their levels across the language skills coincide. It is quite evident that all the participants have some problems with listening as the frequencies in this skill are lower than the other ones. It might be ascribed to dialectal variation or lack of listening practice. It is axiomatic that listening is the basis of learning all the other language skills. The highly significant correlation between listening and speaking highlights the need for giving both skills due attention. Writing ranks second in difficulty. The reason for this will be discussed in later. Here the need for writing, listening and speaking highly correlate as well. This reflects the real need for instructional focus.

Needs Analysis

Overall Need for English

Table 3: Frequency table of the need for English at work

No. of Years	Number	Valid Percentage
0 Valid	7	1.1
Never	50	7.8
Seldom	89	13.8
Sometimes	166	25.8
Usually	159	24.7
Always	173	26.9

Table 3 displays the percentage of the frequency of the need for English at work. This shows that more than 77% of this workforce needs to use English at varying degrees which surpass the 50% boundary. This reflects the great need for English in the work market. Only 21.6% do not need to use English though some in this category need to use it sporadically. The majority of the participants had their education in governmental schools. Thirty nine (39) had their education in foreign countries. Yet, it is not quite clear whether these foreign countries are English speaking or not.

The participants' responses to the question on translation reflect a drastic lack of this skill. More than half of the participants admit that their translation abilities are either nil, poor or average. It is quite understandable that this skill is highly professional and requires specialized instruction and training.

Needs per Language Skill

Table 4: Percentages of the Need of English Skills at Work

Need Scale	Reading %	Writing %	Speaking %	Listening %
0 valid	6.5	7.1	6.1	6.8
Never	7.5	10.4	8.2	9.8
A little	13.8	19.3	14.8	17.2
Sometimes	16.9	18.5	17.5	17.2
Usually	24.1	20.7	25.5	22.2
Always	31.2	24.1	28.0	24.2

As can be seen in Table 4, those who do not need English at work constitute a small proportion of the study sample. Writing and speaking are the least needed of the four skills. Reading and listening seem to be the most needed. Moreover, as for those who need English a "little", they still need more writing than the other language skills (19.3%). 50%+ of the participants "always" or "usually" need English for work. Those individuals seem to have a similar degree of need for the four skills.

The following table demonstrates the highly significant correlation coefficients between the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients between Language Skills

Skill	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Reading		0.911	0.986	0.955
Writing			0.935	0.983
Speaking				0.980
Listening				

The high positive correlations between and among the participants' assessment of their needs for English in their job provides evidence to the interdependence and integration of the four skills. This in turn substantiates the concept of catering for the four language skills simultaneously.

Language skills are complementary. This could be attributed to the fact that most individual skills involve one or more of the other skills when operating. For example, speaking involves listening in oral

communication, and writing for note-taking. Similarly, writing involves reading even for revision, and writing for note-taking or commenting and speaking for reading out to an audience. It is a warranted conclusion to state that not one skill could function in isolation of the other skills. Hence, the argument for integrating language skills is quite powerful and plausible.

The following bar graph provides visual display of the correlation between and among the participants' needs for the four skills.

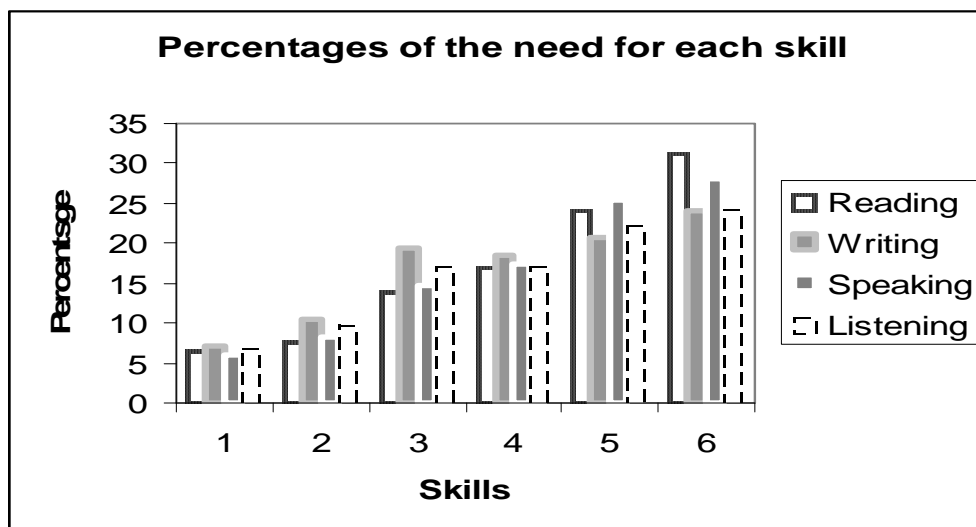


Figure 1: Percentage of the need for each skill

This diagram shows that speaking for those who "always" need English at work is much more needed than listening. Listening is the least needed of all the skills. On the other hand, Reading is the most demanded skill for those who use English most of the time. It's unexpected that writing ranks the lowest for those who "always" need English at work. For those who "sometimes" need English at work, they, unlike the "always" group need writing more than the other skills and reading less. It is quite clear that the four skills are considerably needed in the work market.

Domains of Needs per Skill

Need for Reading

Reading is a pivotal skill that almost all language courses cater for. Without reading, all other language skills are at crucial disadvantage. In the present study it is attempted to delineate the various reading types that might be needed by the graduates of the University of Qatar for work. Of course there may be some other types of reading such as reading manuals, or catalogues, or directions, however, the ones listed hereafter are those deemed to be more closely related with actual work and careers according to the demographic data of the study participants. It is worth mentioning here that these reading types are not presented in any specific order. Reading here is conceived as a general skill without specifying whether it is skimming, scanning or intensive reading. It seems that further research needs to be conducted to provide more specific information about each individual skill in its own right. The present research is meant to deal with language skills in a global holistic way.

Table 6: Percentages of the Participants' Reading Responses

Degree of Need	Mail	Reports	Notes	Accounts	Research	Computer Material	Bills
Valid 0	10.6	8.5	11.0	14.8	13.2	12.4	14.1
Never	16.1	15.2	20.2	22.7	19.6	13.0	22.8
A little	15.1	14.3	14.3	15.2	14.9	9.6	13.5
Sometimes	13.8	13.5	13.7	12.4	15.8	14.1	12.9
Usually	16.3	19.9	14.3	12.3	15.8	18.8	13.2
Always	28.1	28.6	26.6	22.7	20.7	32.0	23.4

The striking point here is that the invalid responses to this particular question are proportionally higher than all the previous ones. Looking at the two rows of Valid 0 and "never", it is quite evident that about 30% of the study sample do not need reading of any type. If the third row of "little" is added, the negative ratio amounts to almost half the sample population. The only exception in this category is "reading computer" material. As for those who need to read English at work, they have the highest individual percentage. However, the other percentages of "never", a "little" and "sometimes" overweigh them considerably. "Reading bills" seems to be the least required reading skill. "Reading mail" for those who need reading "always" ranks second to "reading computer material". As for those who need reading a "little", "reading accounts" ranks top. On the other hand, "reading research" is not on high demand by all the respondents though it is slightly higher for those who "sometimes" need reading at work.

Need for Writing

Writing is one of the language skills that receive less attention than reading. The learners usually find writing a hard nut to crack. Qutbah (1991, p. 236) survey of the teachers' assessment of the students' command of English language skills shows the profundity of the problem of acquiring the writing skill: *"Comparing the answers of the two groups of informants we see that they agree in general that the writing skills of the students are very weak."* However, writing is an academic university requirement in all the colleges. It may also be professionally required after the students' graduation. To investigate this latter requirement, the present study asked the informants to assess their need for this skill as far as their jobs are concerned. Here are the results of the informants' self-assessment of their vocational writing needs:

Table 7: Percentages of the Participants' Writing Need Responses

Degree of Need	letters	Reports	Notes	Calculations	Research	Computer	Bills
Valid 0	12.4	10.4	12.6	14.1	13.5	12.4	14.1
Never	23.1	25.3	27.3	30.4	30.1	13.0	22.8
A little	14.9	12.6	13.2	13.8	13.7	9.6	13.5
Sometimes	11.8	12.3	12.4	11.2	12.7	14.1	12.9
Usually	15.8	15.7	12.4	12.6	10.7	18.8	13.2
Always	21.9	23.8	22.0	17.9	19.3	32.0	23.4

The above table reveals how English is on the greatest demand in computer language. If we group the valid 0 responses with those who "never" need writing and those who need it a "little" we find that 50% or more of the participants seldom need English in writing letters, reports, notes, accounts, research or bills. On the other hand, this percentage drops to 35% for the need to write in English in computer work indicating that 65% of this particular population needs this skill for this particular activity. The same applies to those who need writing in English "sometimes", "usually" and "always" as less than 50% claimed that they need it for all the above tabulated activities except for computer work whose percentage rose to 65%. The argument made here is that there may be an overlap between the participants' vocational and personal needs. Valid still is the profundity of this particular linguistic need which should thus be given priority in any English language instructional program. The need for report writing in English ranks next as it has got 51.8% positive responses.

Need for Listening

The importance of listening has been gaining grounds since the media boom in the last few decades. Recent research has manifested real interest in the role the listening skills play at workplace. In a study of Fortune 500 Corporations, Wolvin and Coakley (1991) found that listening was perceived to be crucial for communication at work with regards to entry-level employment, job success, general career competence, managerial competency, and effectiveness of relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Yet, listening remains one of the least understood processes in language learning despite the recognition of the critical role it plays both in communication and in language acquisition (Morley, 1991). As language teaching has moved toward comprehension-based approaches, listening to learn has become an important element in the adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom (Lund, 1990).

Table 8: Percentages of the Participants' Listening Need Responses

Degree of Need	Meetings	Buying & Selling	Note-taking	Contact with other Firms	Foreign colleague	Arab colleague	Training
Valid 0	10.6	18.8	19.6	12.4	10.4	12.6	15.7
Never	14.9	32	16.3	15.7	16.8	26.7	24.5
A little	10.7	11.8	11.5	13.2	12.0	17.5	11.5
Sometimes	12.0	10.4	15.1	18.5	13.7	20.7	14.1
Usually	24.4	12	18.2	20.5	19.9	12.7	15.2
Always	27.5	15.1	19.4	19.7	27.3	9.8	18.9

Compared with table 7, this table shows that the need for listening is greater than the need for writing. Listening at meetings seems to be the most commonly needed skill. The percentages from "sometimes" to "always" constitute almost 64%, which is comparatively higher than most other needs. The least needed skill is "listening to Arab Colleagues" which must be anticipated since the situation sounds rather eccentric. Similarly, the need for English in purchasing and selling is minimal; 31.7 % of the participants "never" need it and 10.7 % need it a "little". On the other hand, the need for listening to foreign colleagues has the same high percentage as listening at meetings.

Need for Speaking

Perhaps the one skill that is not easy to teach or to test in an ESL context is speaking. The data elicited from the present research's respondents indicate a high need for the speaking skill. The ability to speak clearly and concisely and to convey information or articulate an opinion is essential for most jobs with internal or external customer contact. A good communicator is comfortable speaking to an individual or a group.

Table 9: Percentages of the Participants' Speaking Need Responses

Degree of Need	Meetings	Buying & Selling	Contact With other Firms	Foreign Colleague communication	Arab Colleague communication	Training
Valid 0	11.5	18.5	12	9.3	11.6	15.5
Never	15.5	31.7	14.6	16	25.3	22.5
A little	10.9	10.7	13	12.4	19.3	12.7
Sometimes	13.0	10.4	18.8	18.5	23.1	15.7
Usually	23.6	12.4	23.3	23.3	11.2	14.9
Always	25.5	16.3	18.3	18.3	9.6	18.6

This table reflects the participants' great need for speaking skill at work. It is quite obvious that most of the (65.1%) need speaking at meetings. This skill requires self-confidence besides knowledge of the art. Speaking for buying and selling seems to be the least demanded (39.1%). There is no real need for spoken English in this particular respect as most shops and stores in Qatar are run by Arabic speakers. The 39.1% might pertain to buying and selling within the international domain (i.e. imports and export). The other types of speaking skills share the same need profundity as they all have 60.1% and 64%. The question that arises here is why almost 50% of the respondents need to communicate with their Arab co-workers. It is dubious whether they mean speaking continuously in English or just exchanging some sporadic English words.

Need for Translation

Translation in the Qatari education system is given meager attention at the secondary school level and in the English department of the University of Qatar for English language majors only. Translation is a very specialized language skill that requires mastery of both languages; Arabic and English. It is

quite clear that proficiency in both languages is not the only requirement for the skill of translation but familiarity with and a positive attitude towards the foreign culture as well.

Hassan (1994, p.186) suggests that there is significant negative relationship between the University of Qatar students' perceived culture distance and their ESL achievement scores. Consequently, the students' acquisition of the translation skill is expected to be far from satisfactory. However, the participants' responses show that more than 50% need translation at work. Here it is not quite clear what type of translation is needed; oral or in writing. Moreover, it is not quite clear whether the translation needed at work is a job requirement or for individual purpose or convenience. Need for translation "at" work, does not necessarily mean "for" work. Nevertheless, translation is a language skill needed by more than 50% of the university graduates at work. The following table lists the present research's responses to the need of translation skill at work:

Table 10: Participants' Responses to the Question "How much do you need translation at work?"

Degree of Need	Frequency	Percent
Valid 0	50	7.8
Never	116	18.0
A little	151	23.4
Sometimes	133	20.7
Usually	107	16.6
Always	87	13.5

This table shows that 70% of the study population does not need translation at work. It is assumed here that if translation is required, it is relegated to professional translators. Those who are capable of doing translation must be English language majors who have been adeptly trained in this linguistic art. The above table indicates that there is a significant statistical difference between those who "never" use translation or use it a "little" at work and those who use it "sometimes", "usually" and "always". This also signifies that our expectations have not coincided with the participants' actual responses. More participants than we have expected stated that they do not need translation at work. In a multi-cultured society, translation is expected to play a key role in most social, economic and recreational activities.

Summary

The tabulated data present a comprehensive and broad picture of the English Language Need Typology. This can be summarized in the following table:

Table 11: Percentages of the Commonly Needed English Language Skills (Need range from "sometimes" to always)

Skill Need	Computer %	Reports %	Mail %	Research	Notes	Meetings	Public communication	Contact with other firms	Contact with foreign colleagues
Reading	64.9	62	58.2	52.3	54.6				
Writing	64.6	51.8							
Listening					52.7	63.9	57.9	58.7	60.9
Speaking						62.1		60.4	60.1
Translation English-Arabic		45.1			33.4	37.9			
Translation Arabic-English		37			40.5	33.8			

All the other percentages of the skill needs are below 50%. It is quite evident that computer language is the top rank need for the majority of the research participants. Listening and speaking at meetings ranks second and contact with foreign colleagues comes third. In brief, the dire linguistic need per-

tains exclusively to actual, everyday life practice. It is striking that the needs for reading and writing are identical. This is evidence to the perfect interrelationship between both skills. Here the needs for reading and writing come first and foremost. Then it is quite evident that the need for the listening and speaking skills are absolutely intense. According to the above hierarchy list, two vocational activities require reading, one activity only requires writing. On the other hand, five activities require listening and three require speaking. This hierarchy sheds realistic light on the ESL courses that are to be designed with vocational language use in perspective.

Conclusion

It is widely recognized that a high percentage of today's school leavers find themselves unemployed due to lack of relevant skills and qualifications and low educational attainment. English has become a major vocational requirement in this age of technology and globalization. The English language courses taught by the University of Qatar seem to incorporate a large part of the needs for English in the workplace. However, the courses taught to the students of humanities need adjustments to meet the work needs. It is a truism now that successful education caters for the learners' needs. Consequently, the present research is meant to provide the educational policy makers and course designers with reliable information about the need for vocational English so that they might reconstruct the existent courses and curricula to be more functional and successful.

The results showed that English language is highly needed for work in both state and private institutions in Qatar. Some graduates voiced their need for certain language skills that were not included in their university English language courses such as translation and aural skills. It was also demonstrated that types of jobs affect the degree of need for English. For example, computer technicians, pharmacologists, and typists showed a higher degree of need for English for their work than the other jobs. Another important finding is that there is no correlation between a number of independent factors, such as years of experience and age, and the degree of need for English language.

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