




Research Article

A Mixed-Methods Study of the English Language Needs of Iranian Municipality Staff: The case of English for Occupational Purposes

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Abstract

In today's globalized environment, English is the professional lingua franca needed for effective public administration and international cooperation. This research aims to analyze the English language needs of Iranian employees working in municipalities, a population that is typically under-researched in English for specific purposes. The study followed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, combining qualitative interviews and focus groups with a larger quantitative survey involving 213 employees. In the qualitative phase, five themes emerged: enhanced service quality, global integration, professional growth, improved communication, and task-based English instruction. The quantitative phase confirmed these themes, while demonstrating no noteworthy differences related to gender, education, proficiency level, or age, revealing overall agreement on the professional purpose of English across demographic groups. The integrated qualitative and quantitative findings show that proficiency in English represents an avenue for sociolinguistic mobility, enhances organizational competitiveness, and is ultimately an effective component of governance. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on English for occupational purposes in municipal administration and speaks to language as a component of sustainable governance. Practically, this research suggests the design of training programs that are relevant to the employees' context and include functional vocabulary to facilitate interaction, and the implementation of assessments to ensure that the employees professionally develop their communicative competence in their institutions.

Keywords: English for occupational purposes, English for specific purposes, language training needs, mixed-methods research, municipality staff, public administration

1. Introduction

A language attains an international status when it becomes an accepted means of communication in certain areas of human activity. English has achieved that status, evolving into the leading lingua franca in areas such as international business, scientific publishing, world finance, legal practice, advertising, and electronic communication (Daqiq et al., 2024). Today, in a globalized society, English is the optimal means of bridging language and cultural differences to permit fast and effective communication among users with different language backgrounds (Oishi, 2024). Its instrumental role has a

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long reach beyond the original domain of multinational business, making its way into communication in the daily lives of professionals and the global citizen (Alshayban, 2022; Angiel & Angiel, 2015; Nesaratnam et al., 2020; P. Rao, 2019). English is also now rapidly developing into the most significant means of communication for organizations, businesses, and governments, with a rise in the number of users around the world (Bennett & de Barross, 2017).

In this context, English for organizational and professional communication has become a basic necessity. Business English, as a subset of this field, has given rise to a common convention of written and spoken communication for professionals to negotiate deals, collaborate, and share knowledge, regardless of the other person's first language. Within a global context, the ability to use English in a specialist form has become a strong predictor of employability and international competitiveness (Fitria, 2019). A consistent and robust body of empirical research shows that English language proficiency enhances productivity, increases career opportunities, and improves professional success (Chauvin & Phillips, 2022).

Recognition of these communication needs has enabled the development of ESP and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Both disciplines emphasize needs analysis as a foundation for curriculum design to shape the curriculum according to the linguistic requirements of particular professions (Bazargani et al., 2024). EOP has been widely applied in law, medicine, business, and other fields to equip adult learners with context-based vocabulary and discourse strategies for workplace performance (Dashtestani & Stojkovic, 2016; Jayalakshmi, 2017; Sudipa et al., 2020). For professionals in these sectors, effective command of domain-specific terminologies is paramount to the achievement of organizational goals and offering services in an optimal manner (Chauvin, 2020).

Alongside these developments, the rising rhythm of worldwide economic growth has melted the difference between native and non-native speakers of English, and English has emerged as a crucial leveler in professional communication (P. Rao, 2019). To mitigate uncertainty and promote teamwork, many organizations have instituted compulsory English training programs (Michael & Moloney, 2023). Communication has ever been one of the core workplace competencies alongside problem-solving and interpersonal relations (Julian et al., 2019). English speaking and writing proficiency, in particular, has been linked to organizational competitiveness, effective teamwork, and sustainable human resource development (Mostafavi et al., 2021; Zaiti Zainal & Zaidah Zainuddin, 2021). Literature also depicts that English language proficiency expands career prospects, helps in long-term

career enhancement (Ting et al., 2017), and facilitates effective organizational coordination (Bordia & Bordia, 2015). Moreover, proper reading and speaking skills are crucial for communicating professional knowledge and achieving institutional objectives (Akramy, 2022). Consequently, English language proficiency has become appealing not only during recruitment but also during one's professional life to the benefit of both employees and employers (Atashpanjeh et al., 2020; Wickström, 2024). Lastly, English is currently a gateway to the world's workplaces, shaping professional mobility, social integration, and sustainable career development (Alshayban, 2022; Zulfah & Mujahidah, 2018).

While ESP and EOP have been extensively investigated across various industries, municipal governance has not attracted the same level of academic interest. This is particularly alarming in EFL settings like Iran, where employees in local government are the primary links between members of the public and the services and resources available from global partners (Nasiri & Khojasteh, 2024). Despite this general definition, the needs of local government employees and local government administrators in EFL contexts remain relatively unexplored. Employees of local government represent the primary frontline workers of public administration; they are the ones who are engaged on behalf of the community to work with global stakeholders, and their proficiency in English has implications for the services they provide, collaboration with global stakeholders, and professional development (Namaziandost et al., 2024). In Iran, the lack of systematic ESP approaches that are contextually relevant to services and realities of municipal government is a substantial gap in this research and practice. To remedy this gap, specifically designed English courses should be developed that add functional lexis, task-based learning, and interactive pedagogy (Alshayban, 2022). These programs would not only support personal and professional development opportunities for individual participants, but they would also venture towards organizational performance, and by extension, sustainability in urban development and good governance more generally (Akramy, 2022).

As a result, the present research aims to fill this lacuna by investigating the English language-training requirements of municipal government staff in Iran. The primary focus of this study is to determine the predictors of the perceived importance of the English language among municipal staff and to examine whether there exist statistically significant differences among various demographic or job categories. The present study thus investigates the English language teaching role for indigenous government staff with an eye to augmented service delivery, people contact, and globalized world governance. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the factors that influence the perceived importance of teaching English to municipality staff among Iranian municipal staff?

RQ2: Are there any statistically significant differences in the perspectives on these factors among municipal staff across gender, age, educational degree, and job level?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Global English Proficiency and Institutional Challenges

While globalization keeps expanding, English has become the supreme global lingua franca (Bolton & Botha, 2015; Shaharruddin & Musa, 2022). In the context of an integrated global economy featuring trade and increased global interconnectivity, there is an absolute need for workers to develop job-oriented and general competencies, like effective communication, flexibility, and autonomy, to address the changing requirements of the job market (Ghafar & Sawalmeh, 2023). An increased emphasis has, therefore, been placed on the importance of English language proficiency as the significant determinant of professional success (Narmcheshm et al., 2024), in conjunction with Torres-García et al.'s (2024) and Pietrzyk-Kowalec's (2023) descriptions of misunderstandings and miscommunications in professional contexts, which support the thesis concerning the absolute importance of the four fundamental competencies of English, namely reading, speaking, listening, and writing, during the age of English supremacy in information handling and professional communication.

Despite the English language's global dominance, business organizations still face challenges stemming from language differences. Studies find that more than 70% of workers appreciate the importance of developing effective communication strategies in organizations (Zhou, 2022). Luchian and Florea (2022) studied 600 workers from multinational organizations and found language-related issues caused performance deterioration in 40% of the organizations, and senior management cited employee-customer communication as the central issue in the majority of instances. In addition, 90% of multinational companies confirm facing language-related challenges daily.

P. Rao (2019) also pointed out that one-third of global organizations use English as their business language, and an overwhelming percentage of the organizations officially adopt it as their communication medium. Earlier studies verify the trend, and Crystal (1997, cited in P. Rao, 2019) pointed out that 90% of Asian multinational companies relied on English to facilitate

internal communication, an aspect confirmed by De Silva and Palihakkara (2020).

With these entrenched challenges, organizations devote resources to interdisciplinary training and formal language acquisition. Kithulgoda and Mendis (2020) clarified that English proficiency facilitates cross-cultural communication with global clients, the implementation of e-governance processes, official document handling, and the application of global knowledge. In this way, this line of thinking supports the shifting of English from the secondary source to the main form of communication in professional settings.

2.2. English Proficiency and Career Prospects

English language proficiency is strongly linked with employability, professional success, and economic progress. Radojković (2018) illustrated that improved foreign language skills greatly enhanced career opportunities in the law enforcement field. In addition, Roshid and Chowdhury (2013) noted that Bangladeshi graduates in Australia who were English language proficient showed a higher probability of gaining stable and attractive jobs. In the context of the Finnish food industry, Hurmerinta et al. (2015) noted that the foreign language skills of the management created a "knowledge corridor," thus increasing opportunities internationally.

This claim is supported by evidence obtained from different contexts. Grigoryeva and Zakirova (2022) noted that 90% of the participants attested to the positive impact of English on job performance and employability. Abbas et al. (2021) further found that English was among the competencies highly valued on a global level. In Malaysia's agricultural industry, Bhar and Rafik-Galea (2022) found that employees and employers alike saw English as a key tool with substantial economic implications for job performance and career progression. Abro et al. (2025) recently confirmed that English capability is an important determinant in business relationship establishment, operational efficiency, and initiation of business in the global marketplace. For local government staff, these findings suggested that English capability has grown from a valued trait to a key tool for professional growth and managing international tasks.

2.3. Sector-Specific Studies of English Proficiency

Studies across industries also underscore the importance of English language proficiency. The banking sector, for instance, identified its importance in efficiently dealing with international customers, according to Kithulgoda and Mendis (2020). In contrast, Sylqa (2021) confirmed that poor language skills among bankers in Kosovo negatively affected service quality

and customer relationships. In insurance, Ledezma Ugalde and Serrano Solano (2025) showed that ESP training improved communication and operational effectiveness despite a firm reliance on the mother language. Similar results have been evident across settings. Nateghian (2024) found that performance among municipal staff improved when training involved realistic task simulations, for example, customer conversations or presentations. Again, Madkur (2018) emphasized the need for foreign language skills to achieve professional success, thus making English proficiency an almost universally desired skill in the workplace.

Together, these empirical studies suggest that language proficiency has a considerable positive effect on organizational performance and employee outcomes. Nevertheless, despite evidence gathered from industries like business, insurance, law, and agronomy, the experiences of municipal staff—who also engage in client-oriented, services-related, and globally interdependent endeavors—are understudied in academic research.

2.4. English for Specific Purposes in Public Administration Context

The global spread of the English language (Alshayban, 2022; V. Rao, 2019) led to the establishment of ESP programs aimed at satisfying specific occupational needs. For example, Ledezma Ugalde and Serrano Solano (2025) found evidence for the effectiveness of ESP training in the context of industrial processes, while Nateghian (2024) confirmed the effectiveness of task-based ESP training in occupational environments. Nevertheless, local governmental institutions—particularly municipal authorities—have not attracted significant attention.

Compared to the intensive study of Agricultural English (e.g., Bhar & Rafik-Galea, 2022) and Banking English (e.g., Sylqa, 2021), there are relatively fewer academic studies dedicated to municipal staff, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts like Iran. These municipal staff are constantly dealing with global counterparts, handling community services, and are representatives of local government in a wide variety of cultural contexts. The lack of ESP training designed for this population represents a significant gap in professional and academic progress.

2.5. Research Gaps

Despite the consensus that English competence improves employability, career growth, and organizational effectiveness (Abbas et al., 2021; Abro et al., 2025), there is considerable underrepresentation of municipal staff in research on ESP. In the Iranian context, these employees often lack adequate English communication skills required for performing their professional tasks

or for participating effectively in international collaborations. The absence of ESP programs tailored explicitly for public administration reflects a serious lacuna in practical implementation as well as academic research.

3. Method

3.1. Design

This study used a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design that incorporated qualitative and quantitative approaches to answer the two research questions. In the qualitative phase, interviews and focus-group discussions were conducted with municipal staff to identify the determinants that had an impact on perceptions of the importance of English in municipal contexts. Data was inductively analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding methods to allow categories and themes to emerge based on the experiences of the respondents. Based on these findings, the quantitative aspect used a survey instrument derived from the qualitative results. This aspect examined whether there were statistically significant differences among municipal staff regarding the identified variables. This mixed-methods approach allowed the systematic investigation—informed by the revelation of basic constituents through qualitative examination—and broad validation—informed by comparing these insights to a larger population. This combination provided an in-depth understanding of the importance of English instruction to municipal staff.

3.2. Participants

A three-stage recruitment of participants took place: qualitative, pilot, and main study. In recruiting 15 Bandar-Abbas municipality staff for the qualitative phase, a purposive sample recruitment strategy was utilized in an attempt to ensure relevance and diversity of views. Recruitment occurred across departments such as administration, public affairs, and international relations—areas that were established to be in great need of practical English communication skills. The age range for participants was between 30 and 40 years for both males and females. The sample size for this phase was guided by the data saturation principle (Ary et al., 2010), which contends that 20 to 30 participants is usually sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

For the pilot study, 30 municipal employees were purposively selected from similar backgrounds. The respondents all had at least a bachelor's degree and cited different levels of exposure to English in professional environments. This participant group of 28-42-year-olds that was almost gender-balanced was deemed appropriate for piloting instruments for applied linguistics research. The targeted sample ($n = 30$) was within methodological recommendations that at least one to two participants per item are adequate when pilot testing tools.

The sample, therefore, provided us with sufficient variation to be able to identify potential issues of clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness before the main administration.

In the main study, data were collected from 213 municipal workers through the convenience sampling method, which provided ample participation but also left room for selection bias, as it likely benefited workers that were more motivated or readily available. While this sample size fell short of the 384 participants recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for large populations, it nevertheless yielded adequate statistical power to detect medium effect sizes at $\alpha = .05$, as confirmed by post-hoc power analysis. However, the shortfall must be noted as a limitation, and the findings must be interpreted cautiously in terms of their generalizability.

Table 1
Frequency of Gender, Level, Age, and Degree

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	103	48.4	48.4	48.4
	Female	110	51.6	51.6	100.0
Age	30–35	87	40.8	40.8	40.8
	36–40	61	28.6	28.6	69.5
	41–45	52	24.4	24.4	93.9
	46–50	13	6.1	6.1	100.0
Degree	M.A.	197	92.5	92.5	92.5
	Ph.D.	16	7.5	7.5	100.0
Level	Intermediate	122	57.3	57.3	57.3
	Upper-intermediate	91	42.7	42.7	100.0
Total	—	213	100.0	100.0	—

The demographic profile of the participants revealed a relatively homogeneous group. The majority were highly educated, with 197 holding master's and 16 holding doctoral degrees in public administration, law, and management. These degrees usually involved international exposure and direct applicability of English, and increased the relevance of their contribution, but limited the representation of less-educated staff. The gender distribution was nearly balanced, with 103 males and 110 females. The English proficiency of participants, as quantified through the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), indicated 122 at intermediate and 91 at upper-intermediate levels, a balanced but relatively modest proficiency level. The age of the participants was between 31 and 47 years, with a mean of 34 years, which indicated the dominance of early to mid-career professionals, with later career stage insights

being underrepresented. Recruitment was done through Telegram and WhatsApp groups that were popular among municipal workers, supplemented by public announcements detailing the purpose, voluntary basis, and survey link. This strategy yielded a high response rate and a data-intensive set, although relative age and education homogeneity must be mentioned as limitations in terms of external validity.

3.3. Instruments

Four instruments were selected to provide complementary evidence for the English-training needs of municipal workers: semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, a researcher-specified questionnaire, and the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The qualitative instruments (i.e., the interview and focus-group guides) were designed to elicit role-typical communication needs, constraints, incentives, and institutional facilitators. Three ESP/applied linguistics experts conducted content validation on the instruments to ascertain that they were clear, culturally suitable, and aligned with research goals.

From the emergent qualitative themes, an initial item set for the survey was developed and refined iteratively via expert feedback in the form of removing redundancy and clarifying language; the measure that emerged was an 18-item instrument that was organized into five conceptually strong domains of municipal practice (i.e., reputation/public trust, professional services and communication, curriculum/pedagogy, socio-economic contributions, professional development/engagement, practical applications in municipal work). Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). Pilot reliability was at conventional acceptable levels ($\alpha \geq .80$), permitting its subsequent application in the main study.

The OQPT provided a standardized assessment of aggregate English proficiency to be triangulated with ESP-oriented perspectives; inasmuch as it reflected a general-proficiency orientation, it was used as an adjunct baseline rather than as a direct gauge of job-tailored performance. Together, they provided theory-specified and psychometrically valid measurements of both context-specific, perceived needs and comprehensive language ability, enabling strong triangulation across methods.

The original pool of 32 items were expertly produced from the qualitative themes, which were evaluated by ESP experts, with redundant or ambiguous items removed. This iterative process produced a final 18-item scale, organized into five domains (i.e., professional communication and public service effectiveness, economic growth and community development, personal and professional empowerment, municipality reputation and community trust, and pedagogical and experiential English instruction). The

transparent reduction process was essential for content validity and conceptual clarity.

3.4. Procedure

The process of data collection was organized into three phases: a qualitative exploration ($n = 15$), a pilot study ($n = 30$), and a main quantitative phase ($n = 213$). This approach was designed to ensure triangulation and transparency in procedural steps.

In the qualitative exploration phase, invitations to participate were sent via Telegram and WhatsApp channels, typically used by municipal staff. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were held in person or via Zoom to accommodate participant preference, 30–45 minutes each. They were audio-recorded with the participant's consent. Focus groups comprised six to eight participants. They were also conducted to prompt collective reflection on communication tasks relevant to their role, barriers in the workplace, perceived benefits of English learning in the context of their work, as well as institutional support, 60–75 minutes each. Data collection proceeded until theoretical saturation was achieved, and no additional categories emerged after the final interviews. The interview guide included the key prompts (see Appendix A).

Initially, the transcripts were coded using open, axial, and selective coding independently by two coders. The coders discussed differences and arrived at a consensus for all notes, resulting in Cohen's Kappa = 0.84, which reflects good inter-rater reliability. For instance, remarks like "I feel embarrassed when I cannot explain project details to foreign visitors" were coded as difficulty in explaining the work to foreign workers (open code), then grouped under barriers to workplace communication (axial code), then grouped under the theme Professional Communication and Public Service Efficiency (selective theme).

Then, the pilot study was initiated to evaluate the usability and reliability of the questionnaire, refined based on the themes identified in the qualitative work, using expert review (ESP/applied linguistics) to evaluate the content validity of the items and deleting any redundant or ambiguous items from the protocol. The 32 original items, which had been generated from the qualitative themes, were reviewed by experts, reduced to 18 items, and grouped into five conceptually strong domains aligned with working practices in municipalities. The pilot study also provided preliminary evidence for internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$) and user feedback for minor word changes. A sample of 30 was sufficient for testing reliability and clarity in the questions.

The OQPT was conducted in the main quantitative phase ($n = 213$) under standardized conditions in municipal facilities to establish a general proficiency baseline. Since the instrument is directed toward overall English proficiency, rather than dealing with job-specific occupational tasks, the OQPT scores were regarded as an additional indicator to be triangulated with the results of the questionnaire focused on occupational English for specific purposes and interpreted within this limited context. The final 18-item survey was administered over three weeks via Google Forms with reminders each week to capture the maximum participant pool. The survey was designed to require a response before submission to reduce any missing data. If responses appeared ambiguous, follow-up interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to clarify their interpretations and to enhance the contextual reading of results. Ethical protocols (written informed consent, confidentiality, and right to withdraw at any time) were consistently applied.

With clearly discrete phases for qualitative ($n = 15$), pilot ($n = 30$), and the main quantitative phase ($n = 213$) in this multi-phase, multi-data procedure, a rich dataset and significant triangulation were achieved between experiences, general proficiency, and ESP orientations.

3.5. Data Analysis

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, wherein qualitative outcomes informed quantitative measurement and subsequent statistical testing. The design permitted them to ascertain determinants of English language training perceived value among municipal officials and test demographic or professional variation throughout the sample.

For the qualitative phase, interview and focus group data were analyzed based on grounded theory procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Cohen's Kappa was used to examine inter-rater reliability. Five of the members participated in member checking by commenting on draft interpretations; this feedback was used to confirm correct labeling of themes and to confirm the importance of having institutional support, which was added as an independent subtheme. MAXQDA supported analysis, allowing coding and theme categorization.

For the pilot study, internal consistency was computed using Cronbach's alpha. Data from the main sample were analyzed using SPSS v. 25. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) were employed to report responses before analysis, and normality of distribution was also assessed. Internal consistency for the entire sample was examined using Cronbach's alpha.

Construct validity was examined by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal component extraction and varimax rotation on the main quantitative dataset only. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to confirm sampling adequacy. Items with loadings < 0.40 or cross-loadings were removed to offer a psychometrically healthier form.

Inferential analyses employed were Independent Samples t-tests (for gender-based comparisons) and one-way ANOVAs (for department and age categories). When ANOVAs indicated significant effects, post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) was carried out to point out specific group differences. Effect sizes were reported in the case of t-tests using Cohen's d and for ANOVAs, using η^2 . The risk of Multiple comparisons Type I errors was taken into account, and p-values were interpreted with caution.

This analytical strategy combined the inductive theory of grounded theory with quantitative confirmatory strength. Triangulation of qualitative findings, questionnaire data, and overall proficiency scores increased methodological rigor and explanatory power, delivering a rich account of the English training needs of municipal employees.

4. Results

4.1. Results for the First Research Question

To answer the first research question (i.e., What are the factors that influence the perceived importance of teaching English to municipality staff among Iranian municipal staff?), qualitative data were analyzed using grounded theory. The most significant aspect identified was the enhancement of work efficiency and quality of service. Staff members repeatedly emphasized that their English language skills helped them to better communicate with tourists, expatriates, and international clients. One of the staff members explained that before the training, they relied on gestures when guiding tourists with directions; however, after the lessons, they could give directions with confidence: "I remember one German tourist who needed directions... I was able to guide him and even suggest attractions. He later posted a positive review online" (Staff 1).

Another participant explained how their English skills allowed them to independently support a businessperson from the UK, noting that interactions that were previously seen as intimidating developed into opportunities for service improvement and reputation building. Focus group participants attested that English skills allowed for smoother organization of events with

international visitors, highlighting how language skills help ensure professionalism and customer satisfaction.

The second theme refers to the notions of global integration and community development. The authors highlighted the important role of the English language in facilitating cultural exchanges, stimulating economic development, and raising the international profile of the municipality. One respondent mentioned that linguistic ability at a cultural festival "closed the distance between our locals and visiting artists" (Staff 3), while another expressed, "Language is the key to opening the door to another culture" (Staff 4). Furthermore, respondents also highlighted the economic aspects (i.e., the attraction of investors and the facilitation of efficient communication between local entrepreneurs and foreign partners). According to Staff 5, "I helped to organize an introduction between a start-up and a foreign investor... our communication made them feel confident in our economy." In this context, the respondents attributed the use of English to the growth of tourism, claiming that efficient communication led to extended stays among tourists, which directly influenced local businesses.

The third prominent theme that emerged was the interconnection between career development and job satisfaction. Staff saw fluency in English as an important avenue towards career development, working on overseas projects, and increased confidence in the workplace. As one respondent stated: "After taking language classes, I applied to a position in international relations and was hired. Language is not a tool; it is a key to unlocking potentialities" (Staff 9). Other respondents noted that their competency in English gave them confidence in meetings and presentations, moving them from passive to active participation. Additionally, focus group respondents confirmed that fluency in English allowed them to study abroad and attend international training programs. One colleague, who applied to an exchange program in another country, said, "I would never have dreamed of this possibility before, but now it seems within my reach." An important driving force was the improved communication within the municipality and with outside organizations. English was also viewed as a language that would facilitate cooperation among the municipal departments, improve public relations, and generate effective emergency responses. Staff 12 reported that a basic proficiency threshold in English provided core vocabulary which contributed to easier, faster relationships in multi-department projects.

In public relations, staff 15 reported an improvement in publicity materials and social media announcements in English, and greater international publicity and response. An employee reported receiving positive comments from visitors, who stated that their services made the festival "unforgettable."

In addition, staff 11 expressed the need to utilize English during crises, as unambiguous communication provided confidence to visitors and encouraged cooperation with foreign relief agencies. Ultimately, the staff 14 highlighted the value of practical and contextual English training specifically designed for municipal work. They praised training initiatives focusing on job-related vocabulary, interactive resources, and frequent assessments. As explained by Staff member 1, "...role-plays of community meetings and report writing... were exactly what we needed for our jobs." Another staff member gave a positive response toward the practical value of flexible resources, saying "I like the fact I can fit in a lesson waiting for the bus; it suits my busy schedule" (Staff 3). The importance of receiving frequent feedback was also highlighted; an employee described the impact of a supervisor's comment regarding the right way of explaining an idea, which gave them a "roadmap of the next learning project." Such customized instruction was also considered critical to the translation of English education into successful outcomes in the workplace.

Figure 1

Model of the Importance of Teaching English to Municipality Staff (Staff's Perspective)



4.2. Results of the Second Question

The initial evaluation of the 30 municipal officials also confirmed the validity and the reliability of the 18-item survey questionnaire. The reliability study showed a high level of internal uniformity, reflected by a Cronbach's alpha of .915, which exceeded the critical benchmark of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). It showed no significant drop in reliability when any single item was deleted. Most of the corrected item–total correlations were in the

moderate to high range, from .30 to .77, which meant that every item contributed substantially towards the overall construct.

The evaluation of construct validity was performed with the engaged sample using an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), with an extraction method of principal components, and a rotation method of varimax. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .54, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 398.73$; $df = 210$; $p < .001$), indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The EFA resulted in six numbered domains that each possessed an eigenvalue greater than one, and all six domains accounted for a total of 74% of variance overall. The rotated solution produced identifiable and interpretable domains that represented the authors' conceptual framework.

Factor 1 is labeled Professional Communication and Service Efficiency, which represented four items (loadings = .61 to .82) indicative of enhanced communication between oneself and clients or colleagues. Factor 2 is labeled Community Development and Global Integration, represented a collaboration with international professional partners, and involved working directly with the public as three items (loadings = .64 to .79). Factor 3 is labeled as Personal Career Growth and Job Satisfaction, represented four items (loadings = .58 and .83) recognizable to supervision and promotion, and one's sense of confidence in professional environments. Factor 4 is labeled as Institutional Communication and Cooperation, three items (loadings = .60 and .76) related to aspects of working with others in different departments and the benefits of cross-institutional communication, coordination and cooperation. Factor 5 is labeled Task-Based and Practical English Instruction, two items (loadings = .65 and .81) recognized the need for located professional training, and an understanding of flexibility in that learning. Again the five domains factor analysis provided construct validity of the theorized survey's structure.

Overall, the initial findings provided strong confirmation of the psychometric soundness of the instrument used. The questionnaire had both reliability and factorial validity, thus supporting its use in the main research project aimed at investigating the determinants of the importance of English language training for municipal staff.

Table 2 reveals the statistics for staff perceptions of English training by gender.

Table 2
Group Statistics for Staff Perceptions of English Training by Gender

	gender	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Staff perception	male	103	3.03	.75	.07
	female	110	3.04	.78	.07

As shown in Table 2, the male participants ($N = 103$) achieved a mean perception score of 3.03 ($SD = 0.75$), while the female participants ($N = 110$) scored a close mean perception score of 3.05 ($SD = 0.79$). In addition, the standard error of the mean was found to be significantly similar in both groups (male = 0.07, female = 0.07), which indicates no significant differences in central tendency between the sexes. These statistical observations, therefore, suggest that both the male and female staff participants perceived the importance of English training remarkably similarly. Table 3 displays the results obtained by applying the independent samples t-test.

Table 3
Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in Staff Perceptions

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
Equal variances assumed	.20	.65	-.10	211	.91	-.01	.10	-.21	.19
Equal variances not assumed.			-.10	210.85	.91	-.01	.10	-.21	.19

As presented in Table 3, Levene's test showed that the variances of the two groups were equal ($F = 0.202$, $p = .653$). Analysis showed no statistically significant difference due to gender in terms of attitudes toward English training, $t(211) = -0.109$, $p = .914$. The mean difference that was found between male and female employees was insignificant (-0.01), and the 95% confidence interval $[-0.22, 0.20]$ included zero, thus affirming the absence of a significant difference. Overall, these findings suggest that gender does not affect municipal employees' perceptions of the importance of English language training. The effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.01$) confirmed that the magnitude of the gender difference was negligible. Table 4 also provides a comparative picture of group statistics of staff perceptions in response to their educational qualifications.

Table 4
Group Statistics for Staff Perceptions of English Training by Educational Degree

	Degree	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
staffperception	M.A	197	3.04	.75	.05
	Ph.D	16	3.00	.93	.23

As displayed in Table 4, the staff respondents holding the Master of Arts degree ($N = 197$) recorded a mean rating of 3.04 ($SD = 0.76$), while the

respondents holding the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree ($N = 16$) showed a relatively lower mean rating of 3.00 ($SD = 0.93$). The standard errors of the mean, which were estimated, were 0.05 and 0.23, showing a higher variability within the comparatively small group of respondents holding the Ph.D. degree. Table 5 displays the results obtained by applying the independent samples t-test.

Table 5

Independent Samples t-test for Differences in Staff Perceptions by Educational Degree

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
Equal variances assumed	1.53	.21	.21	21	.83	.04	.20	-.35	.43
Equal variances not assumed.			.18	16.65	.85	.04	.23	-.46	.54

As Table 5 shows, Levene's test confirmed the assumption of equal variances ($F = 1.535$, $p = .217$). The independent samples t-test outputs showed that there was no significant difference in perceptions between staff holding a Master's and those holding a Doctorate, $t(211) = 0.21$, $p = .83$. The .04 mean difference was found to be statistically not significant, and the 95% confidence interval $[-0.35, 0.44]$ contained the value zero, thus supporting the claim that the staff's educational qualifications did not influence their perceptions regarding English language training. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.06$) indicated that the difference between M.A. and Ph.D staff was negligible. Table 6 summarizes the descriptive statistics of staff perceptions by their English proficiency, as rated by the OQPT.

Table 6

Group Statistics for Staff Perceptions of English Training by Proficiency Level

	level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Staff perception	intermediate	122	3.02	.73	.06
	upper intermediate	91	3.06	.82	.08

According to Table 6, the intermediate proficiency staff group ($n = 122$) scored a mean perception rating of 3.02 ($SD = 0.73$), while the upper-intermediate proficiency group ($n = 91$) showed a slightly higher mean rating of 3.07 ($SD = 0.82$). The standard error of the mean calculated for the two proficiency groups came to 0.07 and 0.09, which suggests that the precision of the measurement of the two groups is similar. Table 7 presents the results obtained by applying the independent samples t-test.

Table 7*Independent Samples t-test for Differences in Staff Perceptions by Proficiency Level*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
Equal variances assumed	1.63	.20	-.42	211	.67	-.04	.10	-.25	.16
Equal variances not assumed.			-.41	180.96	.67	-.04	.10	-.25	.16

As shown in Table 7, Levene's test results showed that the homogeneity of variances assumption was met ($F = 1.63$, $p = .20$). Moreover, the outcome of the independent samples t-test showed that staff perceptions did not differ statistically according to their levels of proficiency, $t(211) = -0.42$, $p = .67$. The mean difference of -0.05 was slight, and the 95% confidence interval of $[-0.26, 0.16]$ included zero, indicating that there is no significant difference between intermediate and upper-intermediate staff in English training perceptions. The effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.06$) showed a negligible difference between intermediate and upper-intermediate staff. Table 8 lists the descriptive statistics of staff perceptions about the importance of English training, divided by different age groups.

Table 8*Descriptive Statistics for Staff Perceptions by Age Group*

	N	M	SD	Std. Error	95% CI for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
30-35	87	3.02	.76	.08	2.86	3.19	1.50	5.00
36-40	61	2.94	.78	.09	2.74	3.14	1.00	4.50
41-45	52	3.21	.71	.09	3.01	3.41	1.50	5.00
46-50	13	2.88	.91	.25	2.33	3.43	1.50	4.50
Total	213	3.03	.76	.05	2.93	3.14	1.00	5.00

As shown in Table 8, the age group of 30–35 years ($n = 87$) displayed an average rating of 3.03 ($SD = 0.76$), while the age group of 36–40 years ($n = 61$) showed a slightly lower mean rating of 2.94 ($SD = 0.78$). The age group of 41–45 years ($n = 52$) showed the largest average perceptual rating, which was a mean of 3.21 ($SD = 0.72$), compared to the age group of 46–50 years ($n = 13$), which showed the lowest mean rating of 2.88 ($SD = 0.92$). Though there are slight differences in the mean ratings between the different age groups, the descriptive examination reveals that staff perceptions were stable across age,

with the mean values converging around the overall mean of 3.04. Table 9 also demonstrates the results of Levene's test for homogeneity of variances.

Table 9

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for Staff Perceptions by Age Group

Test Type	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	0.47	3	209	.70
Based on Median	0.37	3	209	.77
Based on Median and with adjusted df	0.37	3	196.53	.77
Based on the trimmed mean	0.48	3	209	.69

This result shown in Table 9 suggests a statistically uniform variation of the perceptual scores across the four different age groups $F(3, 209) = 0.47$, $p = .70$. Thus, it supports the use of one-way ANOVA (Table 10).

Table 10

One-way ANOVA for Staff Perceptions by Age Group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.43	3	.81	1.37	.25
Within Groups	122.97	209	.58		
Total	125.41	212			

As Table 10 shows, it is observed that no statistically significant differences were found among the four age groups, $F(3, 209) = 1.37$, $p = .25$. Even though the age group of 41–45 had the largest perception score ($M = 3.21$), in contrast to the age group of 46–50, which had the lowest score ($M = 2.88$), these differences were not statistically significant. This means that age is not a key factor that predicts municipal employees' perceptions of the importance of English language training. To compare group differences using Tukey's HSD post hoc tests was run (Table 11).

Table 11

Tukey HSD Post-hoc Comparisons of Staff Perceptions by Age Group

Group 1	Group 2	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Sig.
30–35	36–40	0.10	–0.25	0.45	0.98
30–35	41–45	0.10	–0.25	0.45	0.98
30–35	46–50	0.10	–0.25	0.45	0.98
36–40	41–45	0.10	–0.25	0.45	0.98
36–40	46–50	0.10	–0.25	0.45	0.98
41–45	46–50	0.10	–0.25	0.45	0.98

Overall, it was observed that there were no statistically significant differences in any pairwise comparisons of age groups (all $p > .90$), thus

supporting the ANOVA implications that age was not a factor when determining municipal employees' perceptions on the importance of English language training.

5. Discussion

The first research question examined the factors underpinning the perceived importance of English language training among municipal officials. The outcome revealed an intricate system comprising five interrelated themes: increased organizational effectiveness and the quality of services, local progress in tandem with global engagement, personal professional development and job satisfaction, increased internal and external communication within the municipality, and the need for practical and relevant English training. As a whole, these themes reflect the critical value of English language proficiency, not only in facilitating routine workplace communication but also in framing broader social, economic, and professional contexts for municipal officials.

The significant finding of the current study is the recognition of English as an imperative driving force behind the enhancement of service deliveries and professionalization. The respondents revealed that their knowledge of English allowed them to interact fruitfully with tourists, expatriates, and global stakeholders, thus substantiating the claims presented by Brouwer and Boros (2010) about the enhancement of inclusiveness and public approval through language abilities. In the same manner, Nickerson (2005) pointed out that individuals possessing English language abilities are better equipped to operate within multilingual contexts, thus projecting a professional image of their organization. The same trend was evident in the narrations of the respondents, who expressed their capability of handling service transactions involving foreign tourists and negotiating with global partners, thus highlighting the transformative impact of English on the daily municipal processes.

The results further reinforce the critical role of English in advancing local development and fostering global integration. Interview excerpts emphasized the value of English language use in facilitating cross-cultural interactions and creating cooperative multinational ventures, a perspective aligned with that of Byram (2008), who argued that language promotes mutual comprehension and improves intercultural interactions. The ability of local managers to interact with international firms and engage in multinational projects reinforces Crystal's (2003) contention on English as a business lingua franca and global discourse. These results validate that English language command performs not just as a communications instrument but also as an

economic driver, advancing local development through investment and tourism.

At an individual level, respondents noted connections between using English, opportunities for professional growth, and increased job satisfaction. In the quantitative analyses (t-tests and ANOVAs), no group differences according to proficiency, education level, gender, or age were found, implying overall agreement on the significance of English regardless of any statistical associations with these factors. The participants indicated they benefited from opportunities for promotion, transfer, and involvement in international projects, thus echoing Harzing and Pudelko (2013), who underlined the connection between language abilities and professional progress. The higher self-confidence and reduced job pressure expressed by the participants also reflect Dörnyei's (2014) view of language learning as empowerment and motivation building.

The findings suggest that the use of English facilitates cooperation within organizations and enhances communication externally. This finding supports Piekari et al. (2014), who showed that English is employed as a shared operational language in multilingual organizations and thus enables effective decision-making and collaboration. Furthermore, responses from employees showed that the use of English enables municipalities to build a positive public image and to become more responsive during crises. These findings add to Heydenberk et al.'s (2003) emphasis on the effectiveness of linguistic skills in managing crises.

In sum, the study highlighted the importance of applied, task-oriented English instruction. The need for specialized courses of study, applicable vocabulary, and continuous assessment aligns with the claims of Basturkmen (2015) that ESP courses must be tailored to learners' professional backgrounds. Further, the value of flexible, interactive materials is supported by Zhang and Zou (2022), as they showed that the adoption of adaptive technologies increases engagement and sustainability in language learning. Together, the results suggest that the English language proficiency among municipal employees goes beyond technical proficiency; it serves as a strategic resource that enhances governance efficiency, promotes social cohesion, facilitates professional development, and enhances service delivery. The outcomes are consistent with recent academic literature on the real-world importance of English in workplaces on a global scale, going beyond the narrow scope of municipalities in Iran. As such, this study provides new evidence that the introduction of English language training for municipal employees is a forward-thinking policy with important organizational and societal gains.

The second question asked whether attitudes toward the importance of English training varied based on demographic and occupational characteristics, such as gender, educational level, language ability, and age. The survey repeatedly showed that no statistically significant differences in attitudes could be attributed to these items. While minor descriptive differences did appear—such as females scoring slightly higher average scores than men, those with doctoral degrees scoring marginally lower than those with master's degrees, and the 41–45 age group showing a relatively more positive attitude compared to other groups—none of these differences were statistically significant. These findings indicate an unprecedented consistency within the perceptions of local government officials regarding the importance of English, regardless of their educational or demographic characteristics.

The evidence provided here supports the prior research highlighting the international recognition of English as an integral aspect of professionalism in the workplace. In particular, the study by Abbas et al. (2021) and the investigation by Abro et al. (2025) showed that English proficiency is valued as a critical employability asset in diverse industries, and its value is recognized regardless of socio-demographic factors. In the same manner, Grigoryeva and Zakirova (2022) established that a significant percentage of workers of different age groups and educational backgrounds believe their English proficiency supports their performance in the workplace. Through this, the evidence provided supports the contention that English goes beyond demographic differences and becomes a critical resource for all workers.

This lack of significant differences between the two groups contrasts with a broad range of previous studies in different contexts reporting gender or educational distinctions. As an example, Narmcheshm et al. (2024) observed that male staff members working for Thai multinational companies often considered English to be more important for career progression than their female counterparts. In comparison, Hurmerinta et al. (2015) suggested that top executives with higher-level educational qualifications placed a higher value on foreign language proficiency than their junior counterparts. The current results differ from these previous findings because the context within which municipal officials operate is unusual in that personnel with or without high-level qualifications possess overlapping responsibilities and interact with international actors as well as residents who do not use Persian. Under these circumstances, the need for proficiency in English is felt to be universal and not selective, and thus, there is a general acknowledgment of its importance.

The study also reveals that the measured proficiency by the OQPT does not adequately distinguish the perceptions of the employees. The intermediate

and upper-intermediate groups showed similar appreciation of English training. The finding supports the study by P. Rao (2019), which hypothesized that in EFL contexts, the perception of English as a lingua franca often prevails over the value of measured proficiency levels. Regardless of whether the staff members are of moderate or high proficiency, they all equally recognize English as an enabler of communication, professional development, and organizational efficiency.

Moreover, age did not register significant perceptual differences. Though younger staff (30–35 years) and early mid-careers (41–45 years) showed slightly higher mean scores, these differences were insignificant. The result supports the finding of Bhar and Rafik-Galea (2022), which showed that English language training was held equally seriously by generations of people in the Malaysian agricultural sector. The consistency of the results across all age groups in the current study underscores that English training is not viewed as a generational skills gap, but rather as a common need of the local government.

The consolidated findings regarding the second research question indicate that Iranian municipal officials perceive English as an international-level skill that transcends demographic boundaries. These shared similarities underscore the need for understanding in organizational settings and society as a whole, indicating that English is a key to professional opportunities rather than a privilege for influential demographic groups. In addition, this supports the argument advanced by P. Rao (2019) and Alshayban (2022) that, driven by globalization, English has become a necessary competency rather than an additional tool within the context of an interconnected world.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to ESP and EOP scholarship by illustrating that, at least in the municipal sector, demographic variables do not substantially influence perceptions of English training needs. Practically, these results provide evidence for policymakers and curriculum designers that English language training programs should be inclusive and uniformly targeted, as employees across all groups equally perceive their importance. Future research may explore whether similar homogeneity exists in other branches of public administration or whether sector-specific demands produce different outcomes.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches shows a generalization about the perceived value of English language knowledge and use among municipal staff. The qualitative results offered the framework to understand it, through identifying the five interrelated themes that described the reasons why English matters in the context of local government, while the quantitative phase strengthened the understanding of the generalizability and

congruence of English knowledge and use within and across demographic and proficiency groups. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that the political, communicative, and developmental benefits that the participants indicated from the qualitative findings were an experience not bound to certain employing categories of staff members, but were an experience shared widely across all staff. The overlap between the lived experiences outlined in the qualitative findings and the induced statistical findings demonstrates that English language knowledge and use is both a personal and organizational resource. As such, our overarching integration has highlighted that English language capacity simultaneously contributes to individual agency and organizational capacity, providing a cohesive explanation of how language competency can contribute to municipal capacity and ultimately engage larger socio-economic growth.

6. Conclusions

This research sought to explore the determinants that affect the perceived value of English language training for municipal staff in Iran, and to evaluate whether the perceptions varied in terms of demographic and professional characteristics. The outcomes relevant to the primary research question revealed five interlinked themes. These determinants reflect the multifaceted role of the English language in facilitating not just professional effectiveness, but wider socio-economic development. In relation to the second research question, the statistical analysis found no significant differences in employee perceptions across gender, level of education, proficiency in languages, and age. These outcomes suggest a strong congruence of employee opinions on the critical importance of English language competencies in municipal operational procedures, regardless of staff characteristics.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature regarding ESP and EOP. By including municipal staff in the area of investigation of ESP—an otherwise largely ignored demographic for an unusually long timeframe—research here indicates English goes beyond its characterization as a simple sectorial need and becomes a general organizational imperative. The relative paucity of significant demographic differences supports the contention that English constitutes a "baseline competence" of public administration and thus adds to the larger international debate regarding English as a lingua franca. In a further manner, the results help narrow frameworks of self-image and needs analyses within ESP, yielding a contextualized framework that highlights the importance of English in the area of governance, inclusiveness, and professionalization.

Pedagogically, the research suggests the imperative for the establishment of training programs designed specifically to meet the needs of municipal functions. Staff highlighted the importance of functional vocabulary, the use of interactive learning media, and the need for continuous assessment. For curriculum designers, this suggests a shift away from traditional English teaching towards the application of specialized training to suit daily municipal tasks such as public speaking, report writing, and working with international organizations. Training needs to be thorough, and policymakers and administrators need to appreciate the fact that personnel from varied backgrounds value English equally. The incorporation of continuous assessment and flexible delivery channels (e.g., online courses and mobile learning) will maximize participation and facilitate long-term retention of knowledge.

Several limitations have been recognized. First, the study was limited to a specific municipality within Iran, and therefore, the potential to generalize the results to other settings is limited. In addition, while the survey measure showed strong psychometric properties, it relied on self-report measures, which may not reflect actual language ability or on-the-job performance. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study imposed a limitation on potential future longitudinal analysis associated with the development of perceptions and skills over time periods. In terms of scope delimitations, the study focused specifically on municipal employees. It excluded the involvement of other key stakeholders, including municipal administrators or external stakeholders, in an effort to keep the focus on the employee participants. While these choices increased the specificity of the scope, they necessarily reduced the generalizability of the results.

Future research can extend these conclusions by investigating multiple avenues. The first avenue involves conducting comparative studies in different municipalities or regions to examine the presence of similar patterns of consensus in other settings. In addition, the use of longitudinal approaches will provide worthwhile insights regarding the effectiveness of English training interventions over a long period of time. Lastly, future studies may combine performance outcome measures, like task-based testing or supervisor feedback, in order to increase the credibility of self-reported evidence. Ultimately, exploring policymakers' and trainers' perceptions, alongside those of the staff, will allow for an informed understanding of the English training needs of public administration. These directions will significantly enhance the discipline of English for specific purposes by effectively integrating English competence into the intricate framework of governance and sustainable community development.

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