

# Why Language Skills Are The Seed For International Business Growth

**In today's global business environment, clear communication is essential. And for companies to thrive in the international marketplace they need to overcome potential language barriers. Indeed, research has found that companies that are effective communicators have a 47% higher total return to shareholders over a five-year period compared to those who are not<sup>[1]</sup>.**

As the language of global business, a level of English language proficiency is increasingly seen as one of the keys to business success. But today organisations report that the standard of language skills, specifically English language skills, varies drastically. A recent survey from Pearson revealed that although 92% of employees said that English was important to their career progression as a second language, only 7% felt their English was good enough to do their job.

To make the most of global opportunities and ensure that employees can communicate effectively with their international counterparts, businesses need to assume a level of responsibility for language learning and commit to raising the level of English proficiency amongst their international staff. This is particularly the case for more senior employees where their language skills need to be adequate for the more complex communicative tasks they face daily, such as leading meetings, delivering presentations and influencing senior decision makers. Organisations may be missing out on the best talent if they don't invest in up to date language teaching, offering employees clear pathways to develop relevant business English skills.

So how can businesses ensure they make the most of the language training programmes they offer? First, businesses need to make sure that their employees' foreign language skills are relevant for the workplace. Rather than training based on general skills, focusing on the specific skills required to perform a particular job leads to faster, more relevant results that can be put into practice immediately. As a response to challenges such as this, Pearson has developed, and recently launched, a set of Global Scale of English Learning Objectives for professional English. The learning objectives are aimed at those developing their skills for work or professional purposes, documenting the skills needed at different levels of proficiency,

from understanding emails on work topics, to conveying a negotiating position, to describing change. An online, fully searchable Global Scale of English Teacher Toolkit hosts all the Professional learning objectives along with associated grammar and vocabulary to help teachers and trainers plan a curriculum or lesson and better meet employee demands for relevant language skills. This ensures learners can gain the real-world communication skills needed in the workplace, such as negotiation, clarity of thought and polite persuasion.

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The fact that many words in English have more than one meaning compounds the challenge. For example, if a native English speaker were to call an idea "novel", fellow native speakers would of course understand that they were describing the idea as new, different or unusual. Understandably, this might cause confusion amongst non-native speakers given that the word can also refer to a type of book or writing. The GSE teacher toolkit also includes 36,000 vocabulary word meanings and 80,000 collocations, meaning that vocabulary is taught within a relevant context and becomes easier to apply.

Training tools like this are more likely to equip employees with relevant, up to date and applicable language skills that are ready for the global marketplace. Training should, of course, always lead to progress and results. So, it is important that employees understand where they need to improve and how they can continue to develop their language skills.

With language learning in particular, students often struggle to overcome the "intermediate plateau" and feel like they are spending years at the same level. Generally, this leads to a lack of motivation and a decreased

willingness to improve their language skills. Using a framework that offers a detailed and graded model to target performance areas across a range of skills offers a much more rewarding and motivating route to increased competence. Assessing employees against a globally recognised and internationally consistent framework, makes it much easier for HR teams and training providers to identify improvement areas and work collaboratively with their employees towards a mutual goal.

By investing in employees' language skills, specifically their English language skills, global businesses can better communicate with foreign partners in the international marketplace, with far reaching potential. For a start, improved communication can lead to new growth opportunities in all markets. It can help professionals to make more meaningful connections with their global colleagues and expand their careers in the long-term. And finally, it can support in generating increased revenue worldwide - which is essential for every global business.

#### References:

[1] Towers Watson, *Communications ROI Study Report, 2009/2010*



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Director of Global Scale of English within Pearson English. In this role, Mike heads up the team developing learning objectives that describe what learners can do at each point on the Global Scale of English. On leaving university, Mike worked as a teacher of English in France before embarking on a career change and joining the world of publishing as a lexicographer. Mike joined the Longman Dictionary division of Pearson in 2002 and headed the list until his move to the Global Scale of English in 2013.