
ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE: BUSINESS ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN BOARDWALK DIRECT SELLING COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

With the current international competition among global companies, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BEFL) has become a necessity. As for one, Boardwalk Direct Selling Company recognizes the adoption of the BEFL concept within the organization to equip its workforce with adequate English language skills at par with global standards. This study aims to assess the organization's current English proficiency and the readiness of its employees to embrace BEFL. This also presents the major English language skills areas that need improvement through training intervention. A stratified sampling method is utilized to extract data via an online survey. Respondents are strategically chosen to represent different strata such as organizational departments or groups, job levels, tenure, and age. A convenient size of 34 respondents participated in this study. Generally, respondents acknowledge the importance of the English language skill set in their job functions and as criteria for their career growth. Half of the sampling population affirms their English language proficiency. However, the study reveals that Boardwalk employees are willing to subject themselves to improving their English skills, most particularly in speaking and writing aspects. Given their willingness, the employees recommend that the company strengthen its BEFL trainings across the organization. Moreover, with the current setup of mostly working from home due to COVID restrictions, majority of the employees prefer online learning.

Keywords: *Business English, Lingua Franca, BEFL competence, multicultural competence, business know-how, language skills*

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INTRODUCTION

English is undeniably the language in today's era of business globalization. English is, in fact, the most commonly used language in many industries. In recent years, more and more multinational companies adopt English as the corporate language to expedite communication across different regions and various business endeavors. In most cases, English proficiency takes a big role in employees' career advancement, especially in multinational companies. English language proficiency is one of the 21st century skills qualifications that help an applicant win employability and other life opportunities. However, simply speaking English does not necessarily mean one is proficient in English. Most multinational companies demand a high degree of competency of the English language. Thus, lacking this skill can definitely affect to applicant's chances of being hired, especially by globalized employer. Siddiqui (2019) stressed that having a workforce that is proficient in English is no longer a luxury, but rather today's necessity.

In the context of English in the workplace, one popular area of research is the Business English as a Lingua Franca or BELF. BELF refers to English as a shared language by speakers of different languages in interpersonal business encounters (Kankaaranta & Salinan 2014). In addition, BELF covers both the teaching and researching of Business English with the intention of promoting both business communications between native English speakers and speakers of other languages, and between non-native speakers. Researchers in business communication primarily use BELF to expound understanding and importance of the use of English language as vital in the communication of multinational companies, which is crucial for their performance.

In the Philippines, Direct Selling is one of the most popular industries that help provide income opportunities to the Filipino people. Direct Selling is a marketing medium that involve a face-to-face selling of products to the consumers by independent distributor or sales agent. It is one of the best business opportunities for people of all ages, especially business-minded ones who aim for unlimited income while having flexibility over their time without an employer. Most of the direct selling companies in the Philippines are multinational companies from foreign brands coming to the country to Filipino-owned companies with international presence. In this setting, these direct selling companies are now required to embrace and implement BELF within their organizations. English language serves as the medium of communication between various international suppliers and business owners. Business communications in different platform, which include personal interaction, online conferences, business correspondence, emails and others, require English as a shared language. Through implementation of BELF, these companies are moving forward with their business goals.

Boardwalk Business Ventures Inc. is one of the leading multinational direct selling companies in the country with over 100 distribution channels in the Philippines and abroad. The company was established in 1989 as a manufacturing company. Two years later, the owners decided to engage the company into direct selling platform in 1991. For over 30 years in the industry, the company has helped thousands of Filipinos across the globe. The company's vision is to be a globally recognized social enterprise promoting life-changing opportunities. With this vision of going global, the pressing need to adopt BELF in the organization becomes significant.

This study is beneficial to Boardwalk Direct Selling Company because it presents the status of the English proficiency of its employees. It also reveals areas in English language skills that the company's Training Department may consider intervention. As the company is gearing digitization and globalization, this study can help the company to decipher on how to equip its employees with English language skills essential in practicing BELF.

English as a Lingua Franca

Lingua Franca refers to any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language (Samari 1987). It is used to promote communication between two parties who do not speak the same language or share the same dialect (Chirikba 2008).

English is the number one recognized Lingua Franca across the globe. English as Lingua Franca is then referred to the interactions between members of two or more different lingua-cultures in English

(House 1999). In the area of international business, the use of English is coined as Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). BELF is a tool for today's workforce which enables accomplishing business tasks quicker and emphasized the business field rather than the type of English.

Business English as a Lingua Franca

In their research, Mirjaiisa and Piekari (2022) identified a problem arising from horizontal communication between subsidiaries of the same multinational corporation. The study presented that as the communication pushes downwards in the organizational hierarchy; poor understanding is reflected resulting to delay of performance. Although, English is considered as the corporate language that can traverse among employees, it does not always solve the problem especially when most subsidiaries are located in non-English speaking countries. The results of their study suggest that corporate training schemes should focus on wide range of international communication rather than a systematic knowledge of the language.

British Council affirmed this claim stating that studying Business English allows employees to develop English language skills resulting to better communication in the workplace. Employees became confident and were able to build strong relationships with their colleagues and clients. British Council works with some of the world's leading companies in providing English training solutions as delivered by qualified experts. They provide services for corporate training and assessments, business magazines, podcasts for professionals and English for emails among others.

In consonance, huge multinational companies, including Coca Cola, RUAG (Swiss Technology), HBC Russia are offering English language proficiency training courses to improve their employees' language skills. According to the Education First English Proficiency Index for Companies 2016, participating companies observed significant improvement in their employees' English Proficiency. As a result, companies have identified potential employees and that they are willing to invest for the enhancement of skills including English proficiency. These companies believed that enhancing their employees' English skills increases their competitive position.

One of the implementers who attested to the effectiveness of BEFL was Rakuten CEO Hiroshi Mikitani of Japan. Mikitani has written about his basis for adopting Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). He mentioned that the lack of English proficiency limits Japanese companies from hiring global talent. He has observed that a lot of time is saved in a multinational company when everyone can communicate easily without the need for translation, thus resulting to cost efficiency as this reduced overtime. Significantly, Mikitani expressed that language barriers hinder innovation.

With the emergence of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), more and more learning institutions are offering courses specific for this field. For instance, the University of Pennsylvania offers English for Business and Entrepreneurship course as funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language. The course is designed for non-native English speakers who are interested in learning more about the global business economy. Learners are expected to gain skills in business planning, market research, the English language and entrepreneurship. These skills are considered essential in a workplace.

According to Spencer (2021), a business writing coach from the University of Massachusetts in Boston, clarity in business writing in the English language is important to be clear and concise so that no much time is wasted and the risk of losing business money is avoided which is very different from English literature where readers can have different interpretations. In her teaching, Spencer pointed out to avoid clichés, proverbs, idioms, and long verbs in writing business correspondence. Instead, good business writing should be short and direct using the most impactful words for the purpose it intends to convey. In other words, simple as possible.

BELF for Boardwalk Company

These literatures in Business English confirmed that English language as the lingua franca in today's business world boosts competitive advantage to companies whose employees are proficient in English language. The gap between the higher and lower hierarchy in an organization can be minimized

with the use of a common language – the English language. However, multinational companies who have subsidiaries in non-English speaking locations should invest in training their employees to become better business communicator thereby improving their performance and the companies' position in the industry.

With these narratives, it is undeniably significant that the subject of this study, Boardwalk Direct Selling Company need strong implementation of BELF within the organization, given that it aims to reach global market. With this study's objective of assessing the acceptance of Boardwalk employee of the BELF as required to specific job tasks and identifying the areas of English language that the workforce need improvement, the company's goal is not far from reality provided appropriate training support for English language is facilitated.

Statement of the Problem

According to English First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), the Philippines ranking in the English Proficiency Index had been declining from 13th in 2016 to 27th in 2020. With these statistics, the English proficiency of Philippine workforce including those in direct selling companies such as Boardwalk Company are generally getting poorer. If no intervention is facilitated, this trend can greatly affect Boardwalk Company because of miscommunications and irrelevant messages that can aggregate the risk of mistakes and intercultural confusions. It can directly result to delay of business transactions, lost productivity, pull out of suppliers/investors and other missed opportunities.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

1. Assess Boardwalk employees' acceptance of BEFL in the company;
2. Assess the organizational English proficiency of Boardwalk workforce;
3. Identify which English proficiency is considered important by Boardwalk workforce to perform their responsibilities; and
4. Determine the kind of training intervention necessary to improve Boardwalk employee's English language proficiency.

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored in Anne Kankaantara and Leena Louhiala-Salminen's model of 'Communicative Competence'. According to this framework, methods of teaching BEFL assumes a shared foundation of the English language. This framework also focuses on interactional skills, rapport building and the ability to ask demand for and provide clarifications. Generally, this model requires all employees to participate in the implementation of BEFL in order for it to be successful. This include both native English speakers and speakers of other languages. Communicative Competence framework consists four layers.

The first layer is the 'business know-how' which refers to the knowledge and ability to do things in the workplace. This includes techniques and strategies that help companies achieve their business goal in different areas such as sales and marketing, networking, operation and administration, finance and IT. They are knowledgeable with the risk factors that the company are mitigating. Business Know-How include formulas, patterns and tactics specific for certain business area. Employees in a company are expected to understand the company's procedures and policies essential for business.

As most companies are expanding their market reach to be abreast with globalization trends, the need to adopt Business English as a Lingua Franca is becoming popular in recent years. BELF competence, being the second stage in this framework, suggests that application of Business English in international business is perceived to be of great importance. Neeley (2021) enumerated the reasons for the need of multinational companies in adopting BELF as follows:

- a. Pressure from competitors – multinational companies need to interact and communicate with clients, suppliers and business partners and that the competence in the English language posts better chances of closing business deals.

- b. Globalization of resources – as businesses employs international employees from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, a common language – English language is important in passing significant firsthand business information.
- c. International mergers and acquisitions – mergers and acquisitions become more complicated if there is a language barrier.

The third layer is the ‘multicultural competence which is defined as the ability to understand and beneficially relate to others uniqueness amid cultural diversities. Tumaming et al (2012) structured multicultural competence with skills encompassing the developing awareness of one’s own cultural values and biases. It also involves the skill of learning to value other’s worldviews and developing a set of culturally appropriate interpersonal skills.

The fourth and last layer in this framework is the global communicative competence which requires cognitive ability to understand one’s own and another’s cultures. This involves the ability to acquire cultural knowledge by mapping one’s culture and aligning the interaction in terms of language ability, behavioral flexibility and managing changes. Global communicative competence resolves issues in unfolding one’s self through continuous learning, developing creativity, fostering empathy and cultivating sensitivity.

Following this framework, the study considered the business know-how of the target respondents in particular with their respective groups in the organization. The study analyzed respondents’ insight and level of acceptance of BEFL within the company. Neeley’s 3-point reasons in the importance of adopting BEFL shall be considered. The study discovered how Boardwalk employees interact with global clients, business partners and suppliers. With the current global presence and vision of reaching more global market, respondents were asked of how the company gets ready in terms of globalization of resources. Moreover, this study sought the company’s readiness for international mergers and acquisition. It also delved with the emergence of multicultural competence among employees followed by global communicative competence.

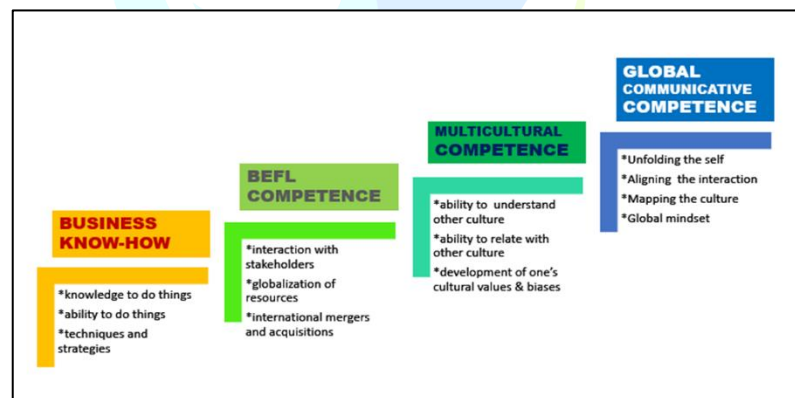


Figure 1. Global Communicative Competence Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a Descriptive Qualitative approach. It aimed to accurately describe the effects of the lack of English language proficiency in the implementation of BELF in the subject company. The study needed to understand the status of Boardwalk’s organizational English proficiency, how it changes through English training interventions and when these changes possibly take effect.

Respondents

The study was limited to Boardwalk Company employees only. A significant size of 30 – 50 employees were targeted in this study, both onsite and work-from-home set up. Respondents were regular employees with a minimum 2-year residency in the company. All job levels, from rank in file to managerial

positions were selected, preferably with representatives from different groups that include sales, operations, marketing, finance and logistics. There were no age and gender restrictions in this study.

Sampling Method

This study used a stratified sampling method. The respondents were divided into subgroups based on the organizational group structure: sales, operations, finance, etc.

Research Instruments or Sources of Data

In this study, the researcher utilized a descriptive online survey to gather data, via Google Form. The questionnaire was adapted from a 2018 study by A. Clement of SRM University and T. Murugavel of Sri Venkateshwara College of Engineering in Chennai India entitled 'English for Workplace: The Importance of English Language Skills for Effective Performance as published in The English Classroom, ISSN 2250-2831, Vol-20, Number 1. Clement and Murugavel's study aimed to find out the importance of English in the workplace by conducting a survey among employees of different companies in India.

The questionnaire aims to extract answers to the following:

- a. Respondents' personal rating of their English language proficiency
- b. Importance of English language proficiency to respondents' current responsibilities in the organization
- c. Influence of English language proficiency on respondents' career development
- d. Areas that need training intervention for the improvement of respondents' English language proficiency

To clarify some entries, a follow-up one-on-one interview with selected respondents may be facilitated. Moreover, the researcher will speak with the Human Resource and Learning and Development managers to collect information concerning the company's plans in strengthening BELF implementation.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher, being one of the employees of the target company, formally sent a request to facilitate the study within the organization through the Learning and Development Department (L & D) addressed to its manager. L & D Department then coordinated with Data Privacy Act (DPA) Committee to ensure that data collection was aligned with the privacy law. Upon approval of the DPA Committee, L & D forwarded the request to the Executive Office for final approval. When all legalities and permission were secured, the L & D Department facilitated the survey among the target employee respondents via organizational memoranda and during their series of building digital capacity trainings within the study period. Survey facilitation was scheduled in a four-week period from 3rd week of March to the 2nd week of April before Holy Week.

Scope and Limitations

This study is limited to the employees of Boardwalk Business Ventures Incorporated. The study focuses on Boardwalk's workforce acceptance of BEFL with regards to their job responsibilities. This study also delves with areas of English language that Boardwalk workforce identify need interventions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study is facilitated from March 29 – April 20, 2022. The questionnaire was endorsed to Boardwalk's Learning and Development (L & D) Department who facilitated the survey through a stratified random sampling method based on company groups, job level, and tenure. L & D statistically chosen potential participants whom they have invited to participate. From 50 targeted participants, 34 have responded.

Research Demographics

Table 1. Respondents' gender demographics

GENDER	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
Male	13	38
Female	21	62

There are more female than male respondents with over 60% of the sampling population presenting the study with an almost 2:1 ratio. However, this does not necessarily equate that the company has more female than male employees.

Table 2. Respondents' group demographics

GROUP	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
Business Admin and Marketing	5	21
Finance and Operations	5	21
Sales	24	58

The numbers on the group stratum predominantly come from the Sales Group with 58% of the respondents compared to Business and Marketing and Finance and Operations groups with 5 respondents each, equivalent to 5% per group. Ironically, Sales Group ranks 2nd in the company population behind the Finance and Operations Group which approximately eats up 1/3 of the total employee population. The dominance of Sales employees participating in the study can be attributed to the nature of their work of satisfying clients, whether internal or external.

Table 3. Respondents' job level demographics

JOB LEVEL	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
Rank and File (Assistant – Coordinator)	17	50
Middle Management (Officer – Supervisor)	11	32
Top Management (Manager)	6	18

On the Job Level stratum, the Rank-and-File level participated the most with 50% of the sampling population, followed by the Middle Management at 23% and Top Management at 18% respectively. These numbers are in consonance with the ratio of actual employees per job level in the company.

Table 4. Respondents' age demographics

AGE GROUP	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
20s	6	18
30s	17	50
40s	11	32

Respondents are largely millennials at 68%, with age 20s at 18% and age 30s at 50%. Gen X comes second with 32% coming from the age 40s.

Table 5. Respondents' tenure demographics

TENURE	QUANTITY	PERCENTAGE
2 – 3 years	3	10
4 – 5 years	5	15
6 – 7 years	7	20
8 – 10 years	7	20
above 10 years	12	35

The company has a high employee retention rate as shown in the sampling population with 75% of its employees tendering 6 years and above compared to 25% of those with the company for 5 years and below. The researcher, in coordination with the Learning and Development Department of Boardwalk presented the objectives of the study to all employee participants, especially with respect to their job responsibilities. The first objective is being an assessment tool in determining employee acceptance of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BEFL) and the company's current organizational workforce English proficiency. The first steps for any company to successfully implement BEFL are by introducing the concept, explaining its importance and integrating it to the systems and processes.

English Language Skills in Relation to Employee Functions

Table 6. Employee perception on English skills as mandatory in their jobs

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	6	17.6
Agree	12	35.3
Neutral	15	44.1
Disagree	1	2.9
Strongly Disagree	0	0

With the Learning and Development Department’s initiative of proliferating the BELF concept one step at a time, they initiated a series of English language-related training for Sales/CSR Group. However, not all employees are aware of such, especially those assigned in the brick-and-mortar stores doing operational functions. Even so, 52.9% of the respondents acknowledge that English language skills are mandatory in their job, 35.3% agree and 17.6 strongly agree. In addition, 44.1% express neutral, which is a big part of the pie. From the 44.1% neutral, 80% are rank-and-file employees and 20% are from middle management. Only 2.9% feel that those skills are not mandatory.

Table 7. Employee perception on English language skills as important in their jobs

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	8	23.5
Agree	18	52.9
Neutral	7	20.6
Disagree	1	2.9
Strongly Disagree	0	0

With regards to the importance of BEFL, 76.4% of the respondents are positive that English language skills are important in their job with 52.9% agree and 23.5% strongly agree. This confirms that Boardwalk employees see the significance of the English language skills across all functions and positions. The 76.4% is a mix of all groups, job level and age groups, with 6 years and above tenure dominating at 80%. The 23.5% who strongly agree are mostly managers while the 20.6% neutral are all rank-and-file employees. As a whole, respondents acknowledge the importance of English language skills in relation to their job functions with the managers the strongest and the rank and file the least. This can be attributed to the nature of their jobs where managers mostly deal with executive reports, client management and building partnerships compare to rank-and-file employees who basically do the leg work.

English Language Proficiency Influencing Employee Career Growth

Table 8. Employee perception on English proficiency influencing their career

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	7	20.6
Agree	15	44.1
Neutral	11	32.4
Disagree	1	2.9
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Given the current company status and direction of going global, employees are embracing BEFL initiatives. Most respondents believe that proficiency in the English language influences their career with 44.1% agree and 20.6% strongly agree. Rank-and-file and middle management strata both garnered 36.3% response rate while the top management stratum at 27.4%. These number are valid because the former two strata are those who seek career growth.

Table 9. Employee perception on English proficiency as a promotion criterion

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	3	8.8
Agree	17	50
Neutral	11	32.4
Disagree	3	8.8
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Moreover, majority of the respondents believe that English language skills are considered as criteria for career development with 50% agree and 8.8% strongly agree. Some are neutral at 32.4% and only 8.8% disagree with this premise.

Employees' English Language Proficiency Assessment

Table 10. Employee satisfaction rating on their English language skills

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	1	2.9
Agree	16	47.1
Neutral	15	44.1
Disagree	1	2.9
Strongly Disagree	1	2.9

In terms of personal assessments, reflecting the overall organization response, 50% of the respondents are happy with their English language skills; 47.1% agree and 2.9% strongly agree. Not far behind in numbers respond neutral at 44.1%. Only 5.8% are not confident with their English language skills with 2.9% each for disagree and strongly disagree answers. Based on these numbers, the organization has relatively high English language proficiency. This can be due to the fact that most positions require a bachelor's degree with the exemption of company drivers. However, it is notable that the neutral responses are also high which presents the gap between average level and advance/proficient level of English language skill set among employees. These figures are confirmed by the percentage of respondents who believe that they have the need to improve their English language skills, one way or another.

Table 11. Employee perception on improving their English language skills

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	7	20.6
Agree	19	55.9
Neutral	6	17.6
Disagree	1	2.9
Strongly Disagree	1	2.9

The study reveals that 76.5% of the respondents admit that improving their English language skills is essential in their job functions; 55.9% agree and 20.6% strongly agree. The responses are almost equally distributed from all job levels and tenure in the company. A small fraction of 17.6% is neutral with regards to developing their English language skills are 85% from the rank-and-file stratum. Only 5.8% reflected negative answers, 2.9% each for disagree and strongly disagree responses.

Table 12. Employee weakness on English language skills

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Speaking	21	61.8
Writing	6	17.6
Reading	2	5.9
Listening	1	2.9
Combination of Skills	4	11.8

In consonance with the above data, 61.8% of the respondents admit that speaking English is their weakest skill, followed by writing at 17.6%, reading at 5.9%, and listening at 2.9%. The remaining 11.8% are a combination of all skills.

Table 13. English language skills importance on employees' jobs

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Speaking	19	55.9
Writing	7	20.6

Reading	1	2.9
Listening	4	11.8
Combination of Skills	3	8.7

Congruently, 55.9% of the respondents share that speaking is the most important skill in their work, followed by writing at 20.6%. However, listening skill is regarded as more important at 11.8% compared to reading skill at 2.9%. The remaining 8.7% are across all skills. As the majority of respondents come from Sales Group, it is somewhat expected that speaking is the most important skill in their line of job, being the frontliners of the company. Their main functions include sales pitches, negotiations, client relations, and customer service. Even so, this does not give away that the organization's top weakness is also its speaking skill.

Company Investment on Improving Employees' English Language Skills

Table 14. Employee perception on company investing on English skills trainings

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	9	26.5
Agree	17	50
Neutral	8	23.5
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

To improve English language skills in the organization, employees recognize that training programs must be instigated: 50% agree, 32.4% strongly agree and 17.6% bare neutral. No one negates this proposition. This shows that the employees value the importance of learning and development in their career growth.

Table 15. Employee perception on company's training initiatives on improving English language skills

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	2	5.9
Agree	10	29.4
Neutral	14	41.2
Disagree	6	17.6
Strongly Disagree	2	5.9

On the other side, data present that most respondents are unaware or do not feel that the company provides English proficiency trainings with majority at 41.2 % answer neutral about this matter. Some 35.3% acknowledge the company's initiative on training the employees with 29.4% agree and 5.9% strongly agree. Not far is the 23.5% of the respondents who totally see no training relative to English proficiency with 17.6% disagree and 5.9% strongly disagree. These results suggest that the company has more initiatives to implement in terms of planning the trainings, awareness of the available trainings and employee engagements.

Table 16. Employee perception on the company's obligation to provide training to improve English language proficiency

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	9	26.5
Agree	17	50
Neutral	8	23.5
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Along with this, 76.5% believe that the company should invest on improving the English language skills of its employees; 50% agree and 26.5% strongly agree. Only 23.5% are neutral on this matter and 0% negates it.

Employee Investment on Improving English Language Skills

Table 17. Employee willingness to invest time and money on improving their English language skills

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	29	85.3
No	5	14.7

Surprisingly, 85.3% of the respondents are willing to spend time and money to improve their language skills. However, 14.7% thinks otherwise.

Table 18. Employee preference on English language training modality

RESPONSES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Online	20	58.8
Classroom	9	26.5
One-on-One	4	11.8
Not Interested	1	2.9

When ask to what mode of training is suitable for them, 58.8% prefer online, 26.5% choose classroom type, 11.8% on one-on-one classes and 2.9% totally rejects the idea.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

This study participated by 34 respondents following a stratified sampling method presents that Boardwalk company has a diverse population among different strata which include groups, job levels, and tenure. Majority of the employees believe that English language skills are mandatory in their respective jobs, even in the largely rank-and-file strata. Given that there is no official mandate as to its adoption, employees are in unison in acknowledging the importance of English language skills in performing their tasks, across all functions, especially in supervisory and managerial positions.

Even with the standard performance evaluation matrix for each group, most respondents perceive that being proficient in the English language influences their career growth. Rank-and-file and middle management strata both affirm this data. Confirming to this result is the common perception that English language proficiency is one the company's criteria for promotion.

Almost equal percentage are both happy and neutral with their current English language skills. This equates to the organization's above average English language proficiency. Even so, respondents acknowledge the need to improve their English language proficiency as essential to their functions. Speaking skills is identified as the weakest English language skill with more than half of the respondents' declaration, followed by writing, reading and listening respectively. In same manner, respondents see speaking skills as the most important in relation to their functions.

With the affirmation of the importance of English language proficiency to employee functions and the identified weakness areas, respondents believe that the company should invest more on training to bridge the gap between the current proficiency status to the ideal organizational language proficiency. This is most significant to the results revealing that most respondents feel the lack of company initiated English language trainings. Greatly, almost all respondents are willing to invest their time and money on improving their English language skills. The majority prefers online training, mainly because most of the employees are on a work from home set up. A few would come to a classroom and one-on-one learning session.

Conclusions

Business English as a Lingua Franca (BEFL) in Boardwalk Direct Selling Company is essential in achieving its vision of becoming a recognized global brand. The organization has a strong acceptance of the concept as deemed relevant to employees' functions.

There is no defined English language Key Performance Indicator (KPI) matrix that is embedded in the organizational performance evaluation tool despite the fact that employees perceive the skills to be influencing their career growth. As a customer-oriented company, speaking skills in the English language must be given priority in English language proficiency trainings. However, writing, reading and listening skills should not be disregarded.

There is a lack of English language training curricula in the organization. Awareness of company initiatives with regards to improving employees' English language proficiency is limited. With this, employees feel the need for the company to invest more in English language trainings. The work-from-home set up of most employees posts a challenge in delivering training interventions.

Recommendations

The company, through its Organizational Development Group which comprise of the Learning and Development Department, Customer Relations Management Department and Performance Management Department, should instigate standard manuals and policies on the adoption of BEFL in the organization.

There should be a defined Key Result Areas (KRAs) in English language skills that include speaking, writing, reading and listening with set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to assess organizational English proficiency. English language training curricula must be designed as aligned with the needs of specific groups and functions. These KRAs and KPIs are then become a section of the employee performance evaluation for promotion.

Learning and Development Department should conduct a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) in the area of English language skills. The organization can design Business English Language courses for different proficiency levels from beginner, intermediate to advance. The training should not be voluntary but instead compulsory.

To practice speaking in the English language, the Human Resource Department may designate 'English Only' speaking zones. Likewise, employees should be encouraged to discuss and speak in the English language during FGDs, meetings and conferences.

The company's organizational e-bulletin can be revived where employees submit their writings. There could be a feature writer for the week who receives a token of participation. A writing competition may be instigated with different subject areas per session which may include proposal letters, invitation letter, letter of acceptance, among others.

To address the challenge on online trainings, the company may allocate training funds for employee internet subsidy who are working remotely.

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