

English in Argentina

An examination of policy, perceptions
and influencing factors



May 2015

Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY	5
KEY FINDINGS	7
MACRO ANALYSIS	8
Education governance	8
Education indicators	10
Government policy on English language learning	14
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ANALYSIS	18
Public education	19
Private education	20
English in higher education	21
Provision of private English language training	22
Self-access English language learning	23
International English language evaluation	24
ENGLISH LEARNING MOTIVATIONS	26
Motivations for studying English	30
English proficiency	32
Barriers to studying English	36
EMPLOYER DEMAND FOR ENGLISH	40
Employer profile	40
Management profile	42
Employer use of English	45

FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING	53
Teaching training	53
Economic volatility	54
University links	54
Technology	54
Employability	55
Politicisation of English	55
Inclusive reforms	55
Europeanisation and anti-imperialism	55
Adoption of 'multicultural' English	56
OPPORTUNITIES	57
CONCLUSION	58

Introduction

Argentina is the world's largest Spanish-speaking country. It has a well-educated workforce, and its economy is supported by its abundant natural resources. However, periods of economic and political upheaval have resulted in inconsistency and have created a challenging environment for sustained development. This was exacerbated by a debt crisis earlier this century, and poverty and unemployment remain high. As Argentina is fairly Europe-centric and has a multilingual history, the effort to raise English language levels has become more of an exercise in appreciating the value of languages overall. The administration of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has centred on economic development with social inclusion, and a push to integrate Argentina more deeply into the Latin American region has given the country a renewed sense of momentum.

Methodology

Phase 1

Desk research and secondary data collection

In Phase 1 we worked with local language analysts to compile extensive background information on the local education and policy environment. An audit of secondary data sources framed the structure and design of primary data collection in Phase 2.

Phase 2

Quantitative primary data collection

In Phase 2 we collected primary data through two main channels:

- an online survey of 1,001 people from the general population, sampling males and females predominantly aged 16-64
- an online survey of 130 Argentinian employers varying in size from ten to over 1,000 employees, with the sample taken from managerial and executive staff

Phase 3

Qualitative primary data collection, in-depth stakeholder interviews

The final phase of our research and data collection involved a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews carried out in Argentina.

Interviews

Government

- Provincial Director of Curriculum Development and Academic Relations, Ministerio de Educación de la Provincia de Santa Fe, Santa Fe
- Foreign Languages Specialist, National Curriculum, National Ministry of Education
- Foreign Languages Programme Coordinator, National Curriculum, Ministry of Education, Buenos Aires
- Operations Director for Foreign Languages, City Government, Ministry of Education, Buenos Aires

Education professionals

- Teacher, Coordinator and Head of English at the Institute of Higher Education Joaquin V Gonzalez, Buenos Aires
- Director, Passport Idiomas, Cordoba
- Academic Director, ARICANA Asociación Rosario de Intercambio Cultural Argentino, Buenos Aires
- Rector, Instituto Profesorado CONSUDEC, Buenos Aires
- Professor of English, Instituto Saenz, Buenos Aires
- English Specialist, Escuela Normal Superior en Lenguas Vivas “Sofía Esther Broquen de Spangenberg,” Buenos Aires
- English Specialist, Asociación Argentina de Cultura Inglesa, Buenos Aires
- Rector, Escuela Normal Superior en Lenguas Vivas “Sofía Esther Broquen de Spangenberg,” Buenos Aires
- Academic Director, Centro Universitario de Idiomas, Buenos Aires
- Director of Business Development, Southern Cone, British Council Argentina, Buenos Aires
- English and Examinations Officer, British Council Argentina, Buenos Aires
- Remote Learning Specialist, British Council Argentina, Buenos Aires

Human resource and recruitment professionals

- Recruitment Specialist, ManpowerGroup, Buenos Aires
- Business Manager, Permanent Recruitment, ManpowerGroup, Buenos Aires

Professional associations

- President, National Federation of Associations of Teachers of English, Buenos Aires

Key findings

- While the Ministry of Education oversees policy and evaluation, education is decentralised; schools and provincial administrations have considerable autonomy in matters such as school governance, community representation and negotiating teacher contracts
- Argentina has a tradition of plurilingualism; many languages are taught and used in the curriculum as well as in wider society, and plurilingual schools are popular in some provinces
- The teaching of a second language - not specifically English - and its associated curricular content, which is set out by the central government, is mandatory in both primary and secondary schools
- In practice, most provinces promote the learning of English over other languages
- Teacher training reforms have meant that pedagogical universities across the country standardise curriculums and ensure that graduating teachers are equipped to teach at all education levels
- To make up for a shortage of teachers, students enrolled in pedagogical colleges may teach if they have completed a certain percentage of their coursework or, in some cases, have passed an exam
- There is a positive correlation between English learning and household income, private schooling and educational attainment
- English learners tend to acquire English in secondary school as a mandatory subject; however, 40 per cent of English learners study at private language institutes
- Those who have not learned English cite cost and a lack of mandatory English lessons in primary schools or from a young age as major barriers to learning
- Among non-learners, 65 per cent would learn English to improve their employment prospects
- English is viewed as a tool for greater employability; however, English learners also feel that the greatest value in learning English is in being able to communicate with more people
- Among surveyed employers, 90 per cent feel that it is important or extremely important for directors to speak English, while 79 per cent feel the same about general managers
- Fifty-five per cent of surveyed employers do not provide corporate English training

Macro analysis

Education governance

Argentina is the second-largest country in South America. It gained independence in 1816 but did not have an established education system until almost 40 years later. In the second half of the 19th century, President Domingo Sarmiento prioritised education as a way to develop and unify the state and its people as well as to attract European immigrants. Libraries and schools were established, including a network of normal schools - like those in France - to train teachers. Historically, coherent national policy and the centralised regulation of education were seen as means of promoting equality, reducing poverty and building the nation and a national curriculum and standards were considered to promote cohesion and meritocracy.

Today, Argentina functions as a federal system and each province, including the capital region of Buenos Aires, has its own ministry of education. The National Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación de la Nación) issues guideline policies, and final decisions are taken at the provincial level. This decentralisation began in the late 20th century, when the international consensus on neo-liberal globalisation policy also encouraged the development of the private education sector.

The system has developed since Sarmiento through a number of comprehensive national reforms. In 1884, Basic Education Law 1420 mandated that it was the state's responsibility to provide free, compulsory, non-religious public primary education. This law meant that students were taught a cohesive language and culture that distinguished the modern Argentinian identity from indigenous and immigrant cultures.

Primary schools were initially under the jurisdiction of the local provinces, but by 1890 the federal government had begun to exercise centralised control. This was cemented under Láinez Law (1905), which mandated conditional funding and the building of school infrastructure where it was lacking. In reality, the central government built schools in cities across the country rather than in the provinces. These schools were often better funded, creating competition between the systems. Quality and curriculums in federal primary schools were standardised, while the provision in provincial schools varied according to local needs, context and funding. The legacy of this early system can still be seen today. In 1978, the then-military government reversed this system by reassigning many federal primary schools to the provinces. As funding was not increased at the same time, this led in some cases to a decrease in the quality of public primary education. This movement of public schools, along with private secondary schools and teacher training colleges, to the provinces was laid out in the 1991 Law of Transference (Ley de Transferencia).

In 1983, Argentina transitioned to a democratic government. A number of education initiatives then began and were detailed in the 1993 Federal Law of Education (Ley Federal de Educación 24.195). This law was particularly significant as it changed the way that education was conceived, breaking away from the idea that education should unify the nation under one culture and language and instead embracing social inclusion. Provinces were placed solely in charge of pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The result was that education provision became much more community-relevant. The central government took charge of a national framework under which provinces could design curriculums based on the needs of their constituents. It also took responsibility for monitoring and evaluation, a national network of teacher training colleges and programmes to ensure equal access for underserved communities. Under this law, compulsory education was extended to ten years, including two years of secondary education, which had not been mandatory up to that point.¹

¹ "Decentralization in education: National policies and practices." *UNESCO Education Policies and Strategies 7, 2005.*

In essence, the decentralisation of education governance went hand in hand with an overhaul of central education bureaucracy: while oversight, policy, evaluation and curriculums became streamlined and remained centralised, schools and provincial administrations were given considerable autonomy in matters such as school governance, forms of community representation and negotiating teacher contracts.² Part of the rationale behind decentralisation was that public services could be improved if decisions were taken closer to the people they served and that rigid and inapplicable decisions wouldn't be made out of context.³

The various aims of Law 24.195, including but not limited to social inclusion and reducing illiteracy and poverty, were not all realised.⁴ There are a number of reasons for this, including unsystematic funding, which at one point earmarked 90 per cent of provincial expenditure for teacher salaries, leaving few resources for anything else.⁵

At the university level, the reforms of 1918 - spurred by student protests - allowed higher education institutions (excluding teacher training colleges, which are under the control of the Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente de Argentina, INFD) to design their own curriculums and make financial decisions, thus promoting autonomy and academic freedom. These reforms marked the beginning of the relationship between student groups and unions as well as the wider political system that still exists today.

In 1993, the Secretary of University Policies (SPU) was established, and in 1995, Higher Education Law 24.521 (Ley de Educación Superior) was passed, revoking the ban on tuition fees and established the National Committee of University Evaluation and Accrediting (CONEAU). Universities were also given greater autonomy to dictate labour agreements with their employees.

Following a severe economic crisis, the National Education Law (Ley de Educación Nacional 26.206) was passed in 2006. This reform had a number of goals. The concept of education became more comprehensive: child-care centres were recognised as educational institutions and compulsory education was extended to the end of secondary school. The system was divided into initial education, primary education, secondary education and higher education, with the final years of secondary school including specific orientations to prepare students for the labour market.⁶ These reforms ensured that the federal government retained power over the education system through centralised guidelines.

Recent governments in Latin America, including in Argentina, question the understanding that simply changing structures involving the private sector and encouraging 'choice' is possible without an increase in resources. The upcoming elections in October 2015 may bring further reforms.

² Kubal, Mary Rose. "The Politics of Education Decentralization in Latin America: Rhetoric and Reality in Chile, Mexico, Argentina, and Nicaragua." 2003.

³ Galiani, Sebastian and Ernesto Scharrodsky. "School Decentralization and fiscal deficits." World Bank. 2002.

⁴ Muscará, Francisco. "Problems and challenges of educational policies in Latin America. The Argentina viewpoint." *New Approaches in Educational Research* 2.2 (2013); 109–116.

⁵ Porto, Melina. "The Role and Status of English in Spanish-speaking Argentina and its Education System: Nationalism or Imperialism?" *Sage Open* 4.1 (2014).

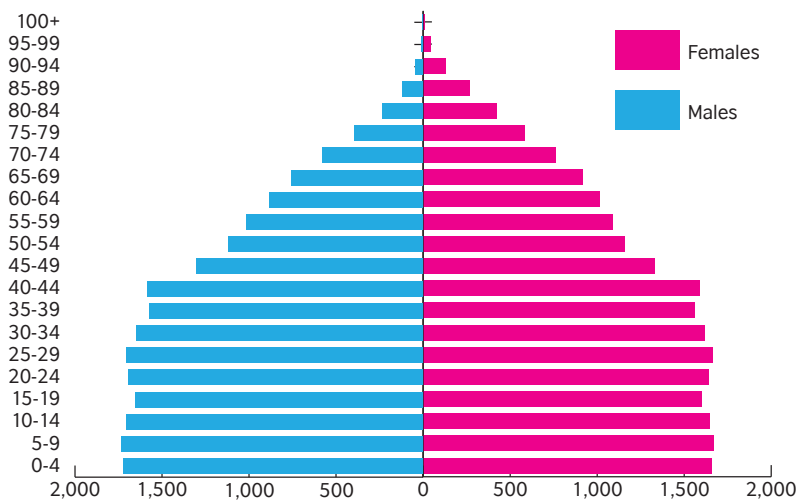
⁶ Porto, Melina. "The Role and Status of English in Spanish-speaking Argentina and its Education System: Nationalism or Imperialism?" *Sage Open* 4.1 (2014).

Education indicators

Population

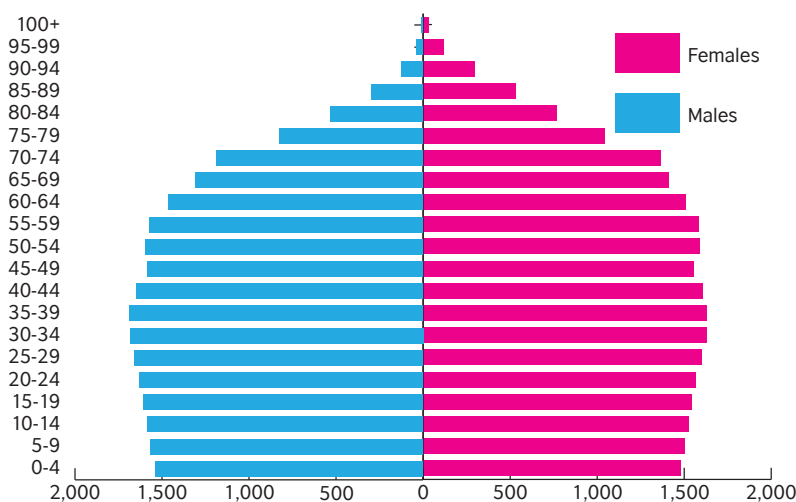
The population of Argentina was estimated at 41.45 million in 2013 and is growing at slightly below one per cent per year. It has an older profile than in many similar developing economies: 24 per cent of the population is aged 0-14 and 11 per cent is over 65. While the population aged 0-14 is shrinking, the young segment aged 15-24 is currently the largest in the country's history. As such, ensuring that these young people are well educated and able to contribute to the economy fully is crucial for future growth.

Population pyramid: 2020



Source: United Nations Population Division, 2014

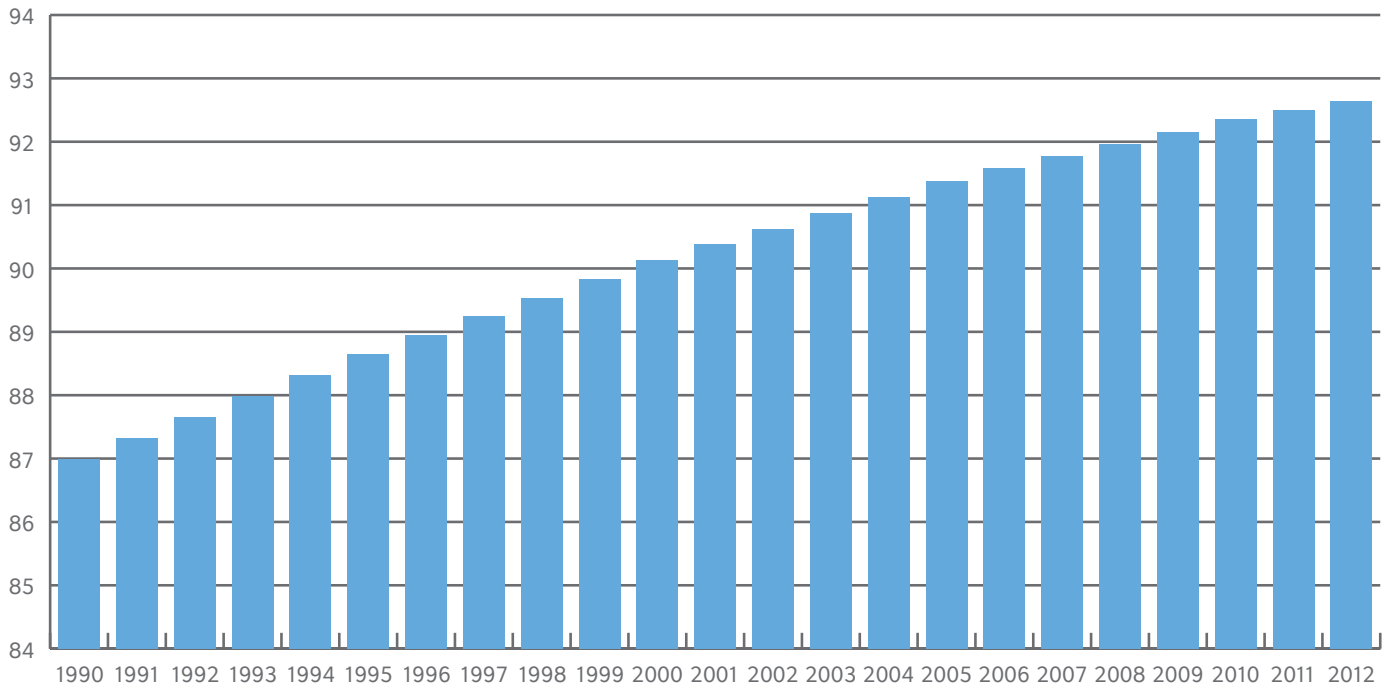
Population pyramid: 2050



Source: United Nations Population Division, 2014

Historically, immigration to Argentina has been high, particularly from Europe. The country operates an open-door policy, requiring only a letter from an Argentinian employer or potential employer and a police check from the country of origin. The immigration of low-skilled labour from within the region has largely replaced high-skilled migration from Europe. However, the economic crisis in Europe has encouraged some Argentinian émigrés to return as well as led to a small spike in European migration to Argentina in recent years.

Urban population (% of total)



Source: World Bank Databank, 2014

In 2012, 92.6 per cent of the population lived in urban areas and half the population lived in the ten largest metropolitan areas. As such, Argentina is highly urbanised. The city of Buenos Aires has a population of three million, but the greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area is home to 13 million people, making it one of the largest urban areas in the world.

Socio-economic divides in Argentina are not as pronounced as in other countries: middle- and low-income groups still have access to good education, although it may take them longer to achieve their goals.

Education spending

Public spending on education amounted to 6.3 per cent of GDP and 15.3 per cent of total government expenditure in 2012, compared to six per cent and 15.9 per cent, respectively, in 2009. In 2012, spending per student as a percentage of GDP per capita was 17.6 per cent at primary level (up from 12.9% in 1999), 27.5 per cent at secondary level (up from

18.2% in 1999) and 18.6 per cent at tertiary level (up from 17.7% in 1999). While spending per student has increased substantially at primary and secondary level, the same is not so for tertiary students. Secondary education has been free and compulsory until the age of 18 since 2006, with the transition completed in 2011; this explains the significant spending increase per student at secondary level over this period.

Education structure and enrolments

The first phase of education - Educación General Básica (EGB) - is divided into three, three-year cycles, corresponding to junior and senior primary school and lower-secondary school. This is followed by upper-secondary education to the age of 18. One year of pre-primary education is also mandatory, and the government aims to extend this to all children aged three to five. Students have up to the age of 14 to complete primary education if they have to repeat grades. At primary level, students study language and communication, social sciences, mathematics, natural and environmental sciences, foreign languages, and art and culture. This curriculum continues at lower-secondary school, and studies become more targeted in the upper-secondary cycle.

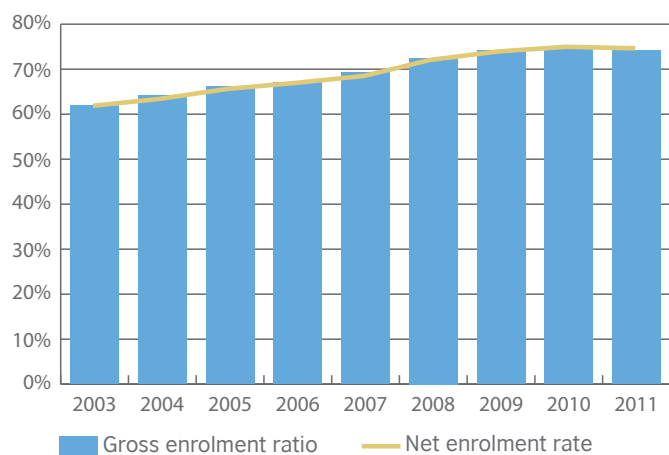
School-age population by education level

Pre-primary	2,021,051
Primary	3,936,401
Secondary	4,051,115
Tertiary (ISCED 5A only)	3,395,133

Compulsory education lasts 13 years from age 5 to age 17
Source: UNESCO

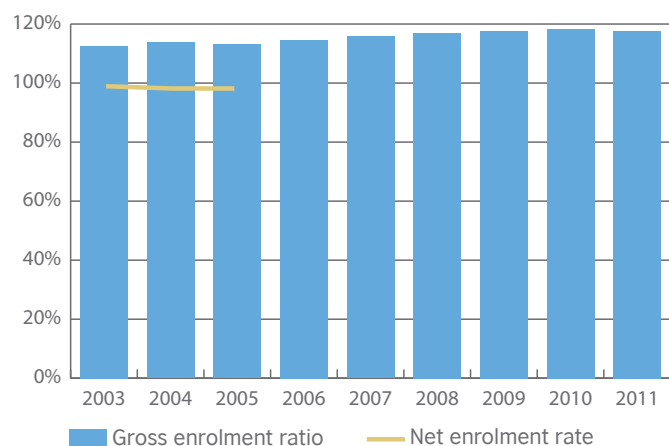
Upper-secondary education is now organised on a poly-modal basis, allowing students to select a study focus. However, some schools in large cities continue to operate an academic model of subject specialisation. There are still three main kinds of secondary school in many provinces: Bachiller (focus on humanities) Comercial (focus on economics and business) and Escuelas Técnicas (science and technology). The latter often offer six rather than five years of courses and are generally divided into specialisms, e.g. construction. Outside the secondary school system, vocational schools offer more practically orientated courses at upper-secondary level.

Pre-primary enrolment



Source: UNESCO

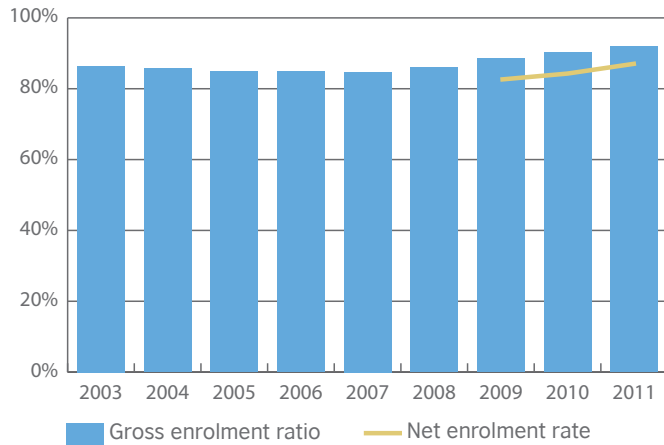
Primary enrolment



Source: UNESCO

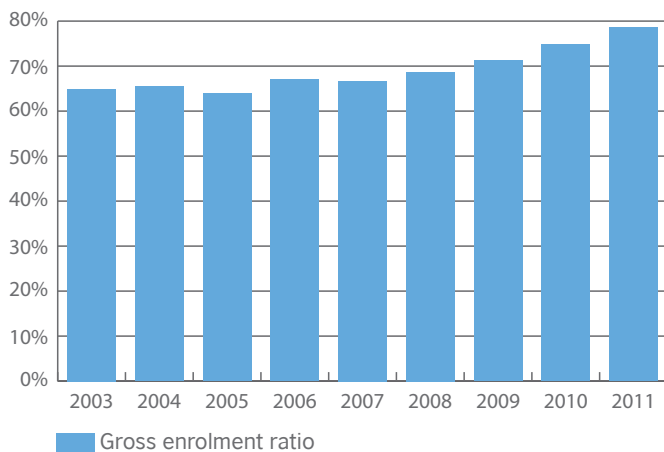
Pre-primary enrolment rose from around 62 per cent in 2003 to 74 per cent in 2011. Gross enrolment at primary level consistently exceeds 100 per cent (net enrolment is not available but was 99 per cent in 2005). Enrolment has also risen in secondary schools, from 75 per cent in 1999 to 85 per cent in 2011. Secondary enrolment is much higher for girls (88.9%) than for boys (81.5%).

Secondary enrolment



Source: UNESCO

Tertiary enrolment



Source: UNESCO

The lower-secondary graduation rate reached 79 per cent in 2010 after dipping as low as 66 per cent in 2008. The gross enrolment rate in tertiary education rose from 64.9 per cent in 2003 to 78.6 per cent in 2011. Again, there is a gender gap, with much higher tertiary enrolment for females (96.2%) than males (61.6%). In general, children in Argentina are likely to complete 16 years of education, including one year of pre-primary education and two to three years of higher or tertiary education.⁷

⁷ Muscará, Francisco. "Problems and challenges of educational policies in Latin America. The Argentina viewpoint." *New Approaches in Educational Research* 2.2 (2013): 109–116.

Youth employment

Youth unemployment (age 15-24) is around 20 per cent, which is high compared with overall unemployment of 7.5 per cent in 2013. Unemployment is higher for young women (24.3%) than for young men (17.2%). While they fell in the past, both rates have recently risen sharply and at a much faster pace than for overall unemployment. School dropout rates have also risen. This has been attributed in part to the education system not emphasising education as vital for society. In addition, economic crises have led students to leave school and take up employment to earn extra income for themselves and their families.

Government policy on English language learning

Historical initiatives

Although English is a foreign language in Argentina, the importance of both the UK and the US as trading partners and investors in the centuries since independence from Spain means that English has been firmly rooted in the elite and some sections of the middle class for many years. The existence of a large English-speaking expatriate community from the 19th century onwards also left a legacy of bilingual and English-medium schools as well as local English-language media. English enjoys high social prestige, which has been supplemented by its growing role as a global lingua franca. Historically, the prestige of the Anglophone community was widely reflected in culture, leisure and sport as well as in education. Bilingual schools, which were established in the 19th century to serve the settler community, were copied in the 20th century by private schools, which targeted Argentines with high incomes. English was introduced in the curriculum in selected public schools in the early 1900s. However, as it was only taught at secondary level, which was neither free nor compulsory at the time, its impact on the population was very limited.

Argentina has always been a plurilingual nation, home not only to Spanish but also to numerous indigenous languages. As such, foreign languages have been considered alongside Spanish in school curriculums since early times. In 1998, Federal Agreement A-15 (Acuerdo Marco para la Enseñanza de Lenguas) made a foreign language compulsory in all schools from the age of nine for a minimum of two hours per week. It was left to the provinces to decide which languages would be taught, so long as curriculums fell in line with the National Common Basic Contents for foreign languages. At the time, more than half of the provinces chose English as the sole foreign language.⁸ In some provinces, the sudden demand for English teachers led to unemployment among other foreign language teachers as well as a dearth of high-quality English teachers. For this reason, as well as other social, historical and economic reasons, the movement towards English was somewhat unpopular. Today, English, French, Portuguese, Italian and German are the five foreign languages included in the national curriculum.

⁸Maersk Nielsen, Paul. "English in Argentina: A Sociolinguistic Profile." *World Englishes* 22.2 (2003).

English language policy

The main federal reforms regarding foreign language education that directly affect English language learning are: the 2006 National Education Law (Ley de Educación Nacional 26.206), the Core Learning Priorities (Núcleos de Aprendizajes Prioritarios, NAPs) and the Reference Framework for Languages, which is the current regulatory framework, and Resolution 181.

Learning a second language became mandatory at primary and secondary education levels under the 2006 National Education Law. Under the law, the Ministry of Education began drafting curriculum documents for English and new English curriculums for both primary and secondary levels were created in several provinces after 2007. The law did not specify which foreign language was to be taught, and while central government policy promoted linguistic diversity, most provinces tended to promote English in practice.

In 2006, the Core Learning Priorities (NAPs) were introduced for private and public schools. These detailed the basic curricular contents, replacing the federal matrix that was used by provinces in their independent curriculum designs. The Core Learning Priorities include objectives, approaches and contents for all subjects, including foreign languages, meaning that provinces can then develop curriculums based on this foundation. While schools can progress past the NAPs, they must achieve at least what is set out in the basic framework. They also detail what should be learned at each stage of the learning process; for example, the number of cycles of a foreign language a student should pass through if they begin studying at age six or nine. While the NAPs provide content for language learning from primary level, provinces and local authorities decide when foreign language learning actually begins: in most provinces, foreign language learning begins at primary level between the ages of six and 12, and Grade 4 (age nine) is the most common year in which to begin. Some public schools, such as the Normales, used to be considered 'language-orientated' schools and continue to teach English from primary level.

As an example, in the city of Buenos Aires (where foreign languages are called 'additional languages' so as to be inclusive), children begin learning English in Grade 1 and the goal is for students to finish secondary school with an 'acceptable' level of English after 12 years of study. Students learn English for three to four teaching hours (lasting 40 minutes) per week, and in the city of Buenos Aires, evaluations have been put in place for students and teachers.

It is the responsibility of the federal government to advise on curriculum design, provide training for provincial representatives and encourage communication between provinces. In order to ensure that all provinces agree, the Ministry of Education discusses any changes to laws with the provinces to better understand how they should be revised. The onus is then transferred to the provinces to rewrite their curriculums in line with the new guidelines. Under its feedback process, the Ministry of Education considers proposals and submits responses or sends representatives to the provinces until a draft is agreed upon and becomes effective. The goal is to ensure that all schools adhere to a minimum standard; whether this has been achieved in practice is unclear.

Under Basic Education Law 1420 (1884), secondary schools were required to teach three years of foreign language. However, low secondary enrolment meant that this only began to be the case in practice around 30 years ago, when secondary study became compulsory. English is now mandatory in secondary schools, and Buenos Aires province was the first to take this step, in 1996. The majority of schools (95%) teach English, although French, Italian, Portuguese, German and even Chinese, which is a new offering, are also taught. This varies from province to province. Many think that specific laws delineating English from other foreign languages is unnecessary given the popularity of English compared to other foreign languages and the limited provisions already in place for other foreign languages; for example, it is often possible to study to be an English teacher but there may be a lack of French teacher training programmes.

In 2009, the government passed the New Secondary School (Nueva Escuela Secundaria, NES) guidelines. These mandated reforms to the secondary school curriculum, including ensuring that curriculums across the country were more uniform. As part of this, the secondary school degree, which previously offered numerous orientations, some of which are very localised, was rearranged to offer ten general orientations, including economics and foreign languages. These orientations were designed to ease students' transitions to the marketplace. As such, some secondary schools developed a focus on foreign languages as a way of promoting the transfer of human capital to certain sectors, such as international trade and linguistics-related businesses (e.g. subtitling companies or industries in the gaming sector).

One aspect of recent language reform is the introduction of intercultural competencies as a goal of language education. The government is creating national policies that aim for a multilingual, multicultural perspective of English language learning. This means that English has the same level of importance as other foreign languages (including indigenous languages). It also means introducing a plurality of voices into the teaching of English and ensuring that students understand their cultural identity in the English language. Some teachers find this deliverable hard to realise due to the difficulty in quantifying it. Anecdotally, some provinces are unsure whether this competency can be achieved through a multilingual approach to English language learning.

Since 2013, the Jornada Ampliada project has been implemented in schools across Buenos Aires. This local programme aims to dedicate three teaching hours each day in the later years of primary education to art-related activities such as painting and music as well as English. The government has prioritised the project for schools in socially vulnerable areas, and the project was designed as a means of English language learning for those who would otherwise not have access to it.

English language learners also have many options outside the public school system. For instance, the city of Buenos Aires runs the Lenguas en Los Barrios programme, which provides free English courses for the community. There are also supplementary language centres that are free for students and operate as part of the public education system, such as those in Tierra del Fuego and Salta. The provision of such initiatives depends on the province.

English teacher training

Foreign language teachers in Argentina are trained at universities or specialised teacher training colleges, which award non-degree teaching certificates. While teacher training colleges continue to focus on topics related to pedagogy, courses at university level include an element of research. Teacher training colleges were placed under the jurisdiction of the provinces in the 1990s and remain independent. The requirements of teacher training colleges are fairly rigid, which partly reflect their historic involvement in politics. Graduates of teacher training colleges must top up their certifications to degree level before continuing their studies. This 'fifth-year' degree became available in 1992, before which teacher training college diplomas could not be continued to postgraduate level.

English language teacher training is one of the most rigorous courses in Argentina. In 2010, universities and teacher training colleges published a report on the four essential foreign language teaching areas: discursive practices, citizenship, intercultural studies and learning. Prior to this, many teacher training colleges approached language and literature separately.

Today, the national government is in the process of changing the structure of teacher training at higher education level. Teacher training used to follow two streams: one for early education and primary school and the other for secondary and higher education. These streams are being merged into one, meaning that teachers will learn how to teach from pre-primary to upper-secondary level, including special education, as part of their four-year programme; higher education teaching will require a further year of study. This new curriculum will cover not only teaching but to also how to handle social and emotional issues. As such, subjects will now include new technologies, philosophy, sex education and ethics alongside language training, phonetics, grammar, culture, psychology, didactics and pedagogy. ICT is also now being taught as part of English teacher training. This was not the case before, and there have been calls for professional development for existing teachers who did not learn about ICT.

The federal government is also requiring teacher training colleges to implement uniform basic standards across the country. This should mean that certifications have increased transferability. At present, there is the view that teachers from 'better' teacher training colleges are more qualified, despite all teachers having the same qualification. There are concerns that this move will result in declining quality as 'elite' institutions will be forced to reduce their basic standards to match those of less prestigious colleges. Historically, teachers in more rural areas were perceived to be lower quality than those in urban areas; however, this perceived quality gap is closing slowly.

One of the biggest issues with teacher preparedness in Argentina is the large number of English teachers who are not fully certified. When the majority of schools chose English as the preferred foreign language, a shortage of English teachers rapidly emerged. In some regions, the share of qualified teachers is as low as 20 per cent.

As such, there are now built-in mechanisms that allow trainee teachers to work during study, benefiting both them and the system. To teach the official curriculum in private schools, trainees at teacher training colleges must have completed 60-75 per cent of the course and hold the secondary-level Examina Denonderade, which tests English ability rather than pedagogy. This has resulted in high drop-out rates at this stage. In Buenos Aires, where English is taught from Grade 1, trainees can teach English in state schools if they pass the Test de Idoneidad.

Graduates of teacher training colleges tend to prefer working in the private sector, despite the job security afforded by public employment, although some will end up working in both sectors. Conditions are believed to be better in the private sector and there is the possibility of tutoring or running a business on the side. Incentives to join the public sector are low. As such, the share of unqualified English teachers is particularly high in public schools. While trainee teachers in public schools may also tutor, teach in companies or run businesses on the side, the high demand for teachers means that they are likely to walk into full-time employment, and preferably private employment, directly upon graduation.

While the history of English teaching is strong, inclusion and open access laws, including occasional bans on holding entrance exams, mean that some teacher training candidates are unsuitable or unqualified. While the profession used to attract predominantly middle- and upper-middle-class females, this has changed in recent years to include students from

lower socio-economic groups, who tend to come from public schools and may not have received quality English teaching or mastered the language sufficiently. There is no expectation among trainee teachers that their level of English proficiency should improve during teacher training; however, as the introductory courses are challenging, students will often realise early on if their English is deficient. Low entrance requirements mean that trainees with A1 to B2 English may be taught together. As the coursework is difficult, drop-out rates are high and many trainees take six to ten years to complete the course: in any given year, just 4-10 per cent of graduates complete their studies within four years.

There are differing views on the involvement of teachers in policy-making: while the Ministry of Education communicates with provincial and local entities, many teachers complain that their associations are not asked to contribute to policy-making and that reforms are not relayed to them quickly and effectively.

Public sentiment

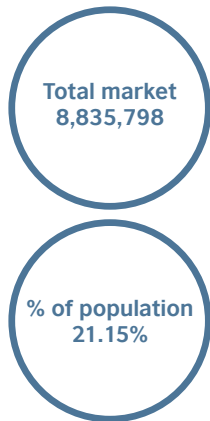
Like other countries that gained independence from Spain in the early 19th century, Argentina prioritised nation-building and the notion that the population should be united by a common culture and language. A centralised, uniform primary education system soon became central to creating such a national culture and sense of citizenship. This changed fairly recently with the decentralisation of education and the recognition of diversity within the population. Economic crises have also fuelled internal migration, breaking up established communities as people move in search of work and better lives. While some see the country as multicultural and multilingual, others maintain the view that Spanish is unifying and should be learned by immigrants.

English has held a prestigious position in Argentinian society for many years: it is widely used in business and is the language of many of the cultural products consumed in the country, including books, plays, films, satellite and cable television, and online media. At the same time, and as in many parts of the region, it is the language associated with American and British imperialism. These feelings were reignited in the 1980s during the Falklands War, or Guerra de las Malvinas, and resurface from time to time.⁹ More recently, English has emerged as a lingua franca for the non-English speaking world.

As such, the language may be embraced or rejected depending on personal viewpoints. Although most Argentines acknowledge its importance, this feeling may be stronger among students from the private sector, who often receive a more comprehensive education, than among public sector students, who may see English as 'just another subject' rather than something that is necessarily useful for the future.

⁹ "Despite a troubled history, Argentina still needs the English language." *The Guardian*. 10 March 2014.

English language learning analysis



Spanish is the dominant language in Argentina, although Ethnologue reports that it is home to 21 living languages. Many of these languages are indigenous, but only a handful are in active use. Immigrants from Europe and Latin America have also brought their languages, meaning that large minority groups speak Italian, Catalan, German, Arabic or Paraguayan Guarani.¹⁰

An official cultural consumption survey in 2006 found that 42.3 per cent of Argentines speak English, of which just 15.4 per cent claim to have a high level of proficiency.¹¹ In addition, 8.3 per cent speak Portuguese and 6.9 per cent speak Italian. The British Council estimates that around 8.8 million people, or 21 per cent of the population, are learning English through public and private education, higher education, private language schools and self-access courses as of 2012.

Theoretically, public students could receive 458 contact hours in English during general basic education and another 228 in secondary school, which should be enough to pass an exam such as Cambridge Preliminary English.¹²

Source: British Council

¹⁰ CIA World Factbook, 2015.

¹¹ "Argentine languages." *Página/12*. 27 Dec 2006.

¹² Maersk Neilsen, Paul. "English in Argentina: A Sociolinguistic Profile." *World Englishes* 22.2 (2003).

Public education

Around 75 per cent of children are enrolled in the public education system, and low-income families are often unable to afford private education. Priorities and funding for the public system are determined heavily by decisions taken at the regional level.

Enrolment by level, 2012

Pre-primary education, public institutions	1,038,767
Primary education, public institutions	3,666,203
Lower-secondary education, public institutions	1,987,384
Upper-secondary education, public institutions	1,224,377
Total secondary education, public institutions	3,211,761

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

UNESCO estimates there are just over one million students enrolled in public pre-primary institutions, 3.6 million in public primary schools and 3.2 million in public secondary schools. English language learning is mandatory from primary level and starts between the ages of six and 12, depending on the province. Enrolment rates in English range from 96 to 98 per cent. Public schools generally have less time to dedicate to foreign language learning, and students receive around two hours of language teaching per week on average. High pupil-teacher ratios and limited resources mean that teachers often rely on writing and vocabulary tasks as forms of classroom management. After the summer break, teaching often has to start again from the previous level, reflecting low retention and little English practice outside school.

There is limited funding to attract trained foreign language teachers, who are not selected by schools but employed by the provinces and then chosen from lists. These teachers are scored based on seniority, professional development and qualifications, among other factors. Salaries for public school teachers are widely believed to be low.

The public education system has been criticised over safety concerns, teacher absenteeism and unsatisfactory infrastructure. The teacher training concerns outlined in the previous section are well established, as are concerns over how individual provinces allocate funding and tax revenues and regional variations in the importance of education. The national government has increased education expenditure and is committed to spending at least 6 per cent of GDP on education. However, PISA scores deteriorated between 2009 and 2012.¹³ Some observers have attributed this to increased secondary-level participation among marginalised groups in recent years.

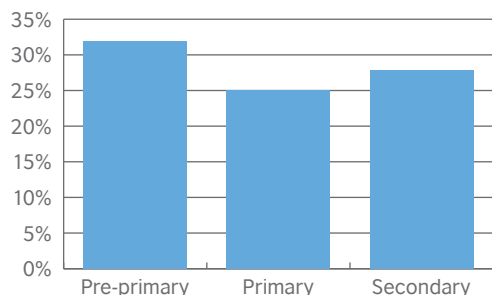
A number of inclusive policies have been put in place to strengthen foreign language learning in public schools. There are 26 plurilingual schools, most of which are in vulnerable areas, where students are required to learn at least two languages. While English is not always one of the two languages studied from primary level, students will often find a way of studying the language anyway. There are also inclusive policies at the regional level: the province of Santa Fe is looking to bring English to sectors of society that would lack access to it otherwise and is running a programme to extend school hours so public and private schools can introduce English at the primary level.

¹³ Poore, Federico. "Poor country scores in PISA tests yet again." *Buenos Aires Herald*. 4 Dec 2013.

Private education

The private sector reached a peak at 32 per cent of secondary enrolments in 1965; today, this proportion is around 27 per cent. This decline reflects a surge in enrolment in the public sector as secondary education became compulsory and available to the whole population. Around 25 per cent of primary enrolments are in the private sector, and this share is increasing.

Enrolment in private schools as a share of total enrolment, 2011



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Enrolment in private education is higher in the more affluent provinces. The private sector grew in response to a government policy of subsidising such schools in areas where there were gaps in the public provision. More recently, private schools have proliferated in response to demand from parents, and some reports suggest that parents will consider spending as much as 50 per cent of their income on private education.¹⁴

Enrolment by level, 2012

Pre-primary education, private institutions	488,308
Primary education, private institutions	1,204,954
Secondary education, private institutions	1,134,630

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

UNESCO estimates that the private sector enrolls just under 500,000 pre-primary students, almost 1.2 million primary students and just over one million secondary students. Private spending on education accounts for 8.1 per cent of all spending at primary and secondary level, compared with an OECD average of nine per cent. This figure includes all funds transferred to educational institutions from private sources, including public subsidies to households.¹⁵

The government has become more involved in private education than ever and oversees the sector to ensure equitable access. In Ciudad de Buenos Aires, all schools are considered government-dependent, although private schools still charge fees. Private schools must follow the national curriculum, even if they also offer an international curriculum, and a second language - usually English - is compulsory. While schools are not allowed to teach more than 40 per cent of material in English, private schools may find ways around this.

A number of schools (48 in 2015) offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, and there are also a handful of bilingual (Spanish-English) schools in the cities of Cordoba and Rosario and many more in Buenos Aires. Schools in the capital cater to various expatriate groups and the French-, German-, Italian-, Japanese- and English-speaking communities in particular.¹⁶ While bilingual schools were once called 'English schools', this has changed over time, reflecting changing public sentiment.

Private schools have high associated fees and are largely only available to high-income families. As they are often profit-driven, private schools tend to have more equipment and resources and are able to invest more in teaching popular foreign languages; teaching is often better organised and of a higher quality than in public schools.

¹⁴ "The Quality of Education in Argentina." Inter-American Development Bank. 2008.

¹⁵ "Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators." Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2011.

¹⁶ "Education in Argentina." Internations. Retrieved at <http://www.internations.org/argentina-expats/guide/living-in-argentina-15328/education-in-argentina-3>.

Language lessons begin in primary school and students experience more lessons per week and smaller class sizes. There are normally extracurricular English lessons, which are valued by parents, alongside mandatory English lessons. Private schools often prepare students for international exams, such as the Preliminary English Test (PET) and First Certificate of English (FCE).¹⁷

Many private schools have foreign exchange programmes with schools in the US and the UK. While students are often interested in such programmes, parents are generally more wary. One challenge faced by all schools and private schools in particular is finding bilingual teachers who can teach subjects other than languages, and while there are many native-speaking candidates from abroad interested in coming to Argentina to teach, economic policies concerning pay make it difficult for private schools to hire them.

Another segment of the non-public school system contains parochial schools, which are partially subsidised by the government and run as non-profit businesses. The English language provision in these schools is generally strong, and parents are often attracted by the religious learning environment, lower teacher absenteeism and limited exposure to teacher strikes.

English in higher education

There are four types of higher education institutions in Argentina: universities, university institutes, professional and technical institutes and teacher training colleges. Universities, which offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, are autonomous and have long fought against government control. Public universities include those formed under the National Congress Act as well as long-established institutions that predate the state. Higher education institutions are usually public or private although a small number fall into other categories, such as parochial institutions. All are supervised by the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU), which oversees accreditation. The Secretaría de Políticas Universitarias (SPU) was created in 1993 to regulate the higher education sector, although CONEAU soon took over responsibility for quality assurance. Traditionally, Argentinian universities had a reputation for quality within the region; however, this has changed as regional countries have strengthened their provision.

Public universities account for around 80 per cent of undergraduate enrolments. Public undergraduate education is generally of high quality, free and non-selective, meaning that anyone with a secondary school degree can enrol. In reality, high associated costs, such as transportation, accommodation and study materials, mean that higher-income students are more likely to attend university, despite there being scholarships for students from vulnerable groups. Entrance exams have been abolished in some provinces, and in response, some universities have introduced one-year foundation programmes to ensure that entrants are prepared for their chosen programmes. Drop-out rates have risen as a result. Postgraduate education is generally not free.

There are almost 50 private universities in Argentina, some of which are parochial. Private institutions are overseen by the Consejo de Rectores de Universidades Privadas (CRUP). These universities are not subsidised by the government, but students may be able to receive federal scholarships and grants. Private universities can set their own entrance requirements, which may include entrance exams, international tests, essays and interviews. Consumer spending on education amounts to 18.9 per cent of total spending at tertiary level, compared with an OECD average of 31 per cent.

University institutes were formed under the 1995 Higher Education Law (Ley de Educación Superior 24.521) and are separate from national universities. They tend to provide courses in specialised areas. Public university institutes are not autonomous, and private institutes are overseen by CRUP. Teacher training colleges, like university institutes, are not autonomous and cannot confer degrees. Professional and technical institutes offer a broad range of programmes and award título 'minor' as opposed to degrees.

There is no consensus on whether there is a national policy on English language learning provision at higher education level. Universities set their own policies, reflecting their autonomous status, and many have exit requirements for English proficiency rather than entry requirements. The SPU states only that university graduates should be able to use a dictionary and read articles relevant to their studies. In reality, university students are generally required to develop or maintain minimum basic English skills by taking two to three levels of English; some universities may have placement exams that exempt students from taking these courses.

¹⁷ "Education in Argentina." *Internations*. Retrieved at <http://www.internations.org/argentina-expats/guide/living-in-argentina-15328/education-in-argentina-3>.

University-level English classes tend to focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary to aid coursework, and students' oral skills often suffer as a result. This follows the wider trend of providing English training that is career-relevant, and there is the belief that expertise can be honed after graduation if necessary.

As reported above, the level of English language proficiency among trainee teachers is varied and in decline, reflecting changing demographics among trainees and easy access to teacher training programmes.

Provision of private English language training

The British Council estimates that roughly 400,000 Argentines are studying English through private English language training (ELT) classes or have the potential to do so. Private ELT takes various forms, and there is a lot of competition in the market. Private organisations such as Liceo Cultural Británico, Instituto Cultural Argentino Norteamericano (ICANA) and Asociación Argentina de Cultura Inglesa (AACI) are well respected and often have links to the British or American embassies. Newer companies such as Wall Street Institute offer more flexibility, which benefits adult learners in particular. Private companies often market themselves on their native-English teachers, although not all instructors are trained teachers. There is also a large market of private tutors, who tend to charge lower fees, and schools formed by teachers.

University institutes may also operate private ELT courses for students and the public. These classes may focus on exam preparation for international certificates such as the PET or FCE, as few students - and public students in particular - manage to pass such exams through school lessons alone. Class sizes are smaller than in public schools and university students may receive discounts, although many are adults sponsored by their employers. Teaching objectives at these institutes vary, and teachers are not required to have teaching qualifications; instead, they are often appointed based on high levels of English and social skills. While some institutes operate on a for-profit basis, others offer additional English courses for the community at low or no cost; for example, Buenos Aires' Ingles en Los Barrios programme offers free community English courses in public schools outside of school hours.

The cost of private ELT varies: private tutors generally charge Argentinian pesos 100-300 (US\$11-34) per hour or approximately Argentinian pesos 600-4,000 (US\$67-450) for a course of three hours per week, depending on the organisation and level.

Self-access English language learning

Self-access learning encompasses private channels such as blended and informal learning through radio, print and other media.

The British Council estimates that almost 2.5 million Argentines learn English through self-access channels. Market penetration statistics indicate that the majority of self-access learners use textbooks, radio and ad hoc online products for language learning.

Access to technology, (% penetration)*

RADIO (HOUSE- HOLD)	TV SET (HOUSEHOLD)	CABLE/ SATELLITE TV (HOUSEHOLD)	INTERNET (INDIVIDUALS)	MOBILE SUBSCRIPTIONS (PER 100 INHABITANTS)	BROADBAND (FIXED)	SMARTPHONE (INDIVIDUALS)
93.2 (2010)	97.8 (2010)	80 (2013)	59.9 (2013)	162.5 (2013)	12.5 (2013)	30 (2014)

*unless otherwise stated

Sources: British Council, ITU, LAMAC

An estimated 232,000 Argentines use TV as a means of English language learning. Pay TV penetration is very high in Argentina, reaching 90 per cent in regions such as Buenos Aires and the southern provinces but falling significantly elsewhere and particularly in the north-east.¹⁸

The use of technology in English language learning is progressing but remains in its early stages. While technology for study and recreation has incentivised some of the population to learn English, others remain unconvinced about its effectiveness. Online courses are well advertised and include Open English and Global English as well as online materials from the British Council and the American embassy.

There are a number of issues affecting the growth of self-access learning. Programmes have reportedly not been as successful as anticipated due to a lack of face-to-face interaction and the incorrect assumption that online courses will save time and money - some online courses cost the same as face-to-face courses. Take-up is also limited by poor connectivity in some areas. Drop-out rates for online courses remain high due to a lack of commitment on the part of participants, and those that do complete such courses report feeling a lack of skills or confidence in areas that are cultivated through speaking practice, such as fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation.

¹⁸ "Pay TV's Penetration Grew Throughout Argentina During 2013." Latin American Multichannel Advertising Council. 4 April 2014. Retrieved at <http://www.lamac.org/america-latina-ingles/releases/pay-tvs-penetration-grew-throughout-argentina-during-2013>.

International English language evaluation

English language testing and certification in schools is optional and students who do sit such exams are often the best students and are selected by their teachers. Reports indicate that some students may sit exams that are below their actual level in order to return excellent marks. There is little national data on Argentines' scores in such international tests.

TOEFL

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is the measurement of English language levels most commonly accepted by universities around the world. It comprises four sections - reading, listening, speaking and writing - each providing a score between 0 and 30 and giving a total score of 0 to 120.

Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Total
24	23	23	23	93

Argentines' scores in the TOEFL are among the highest in Latin America, alongside Uruguay and Costa Rica. The average TOEFL score in Argentina in 2013 was 93, and Argentines' skills are classified as 'high' for listening and reading and 'fair' for speaking and writing (Educational Testing Service).

IELTS

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam is also widely accepted around the world for university entrance and is TOEFL's main competitor. The exam again comprises four sections - listening, reading, writing and speaking - and students can sit 'academic' or 'general training' versions of the test.

ACADEMIC				
Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
7.2	7.3	6.3	7.0	7.0
GENERAL TRAINING				
Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall
6.7	6.7	6.3	6.6	6.6

Argentines who took the 'academic' IELTS in 2014 scored best in reading and worst in writing, while those who took the 'general training' exam scored best in listening and reading and worst in writing. The average score for 'general training' candidates was 6.6, reflecting skills somewhere between 'competent' and 'good', based on IELTS definitions. Those who took the 'academic' IELTS scored 7.0 on average, indicating 'good' English skills.

Comparative English language levels

The following table shows how these international standards relate to each other and to the CEFR.

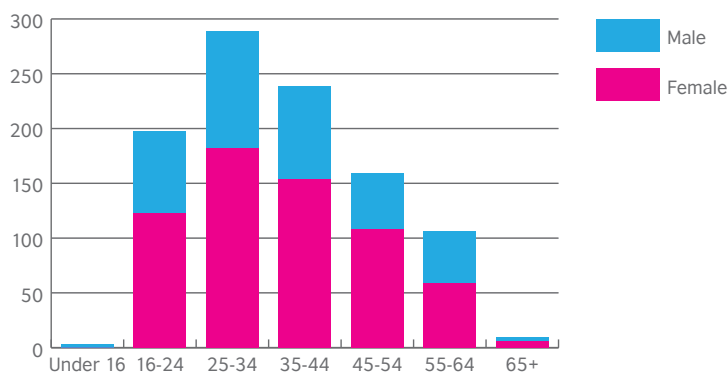
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE TESTS		
CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)	TOEFL iBT	IELTS Academic
C2	120	9
C2	110	8
C2	105	7.5
C1	100	7
C1	90	6.5
B2	84	6
B2	80	6
B2	71	5.5
B1	61	5
B1		Between 4.5-5
A2		Less than 4

Argentines who have taken the IELTS and TOEFL, many of whom probably benefitted from some of the best English language education in the country, are at a C1 level according to English language exam equivalencies.

English learning motivations

The British Council surveyed 1,001 Argentines, most of whom were aged 16-64, to better understand attitudes towards English language learning. The survey was administered in Spanish, and we aimed to ascertain how occupation, education attainment and household income affect English language acquisition and perceptions. We also examined self-assessed levels of English. By contrasting the responses of English language learners and non-learners, we hoped to gain insight into the differences and similarities in opinions and the value placed on English language learning.

Age and gender of respondents



The majority of survey respondents (73%) were aged 16-45 and 63 per cent were female. Interestingly, the proportion of English learners was highest among those aged 55-64, followed by those aged over 65.

Under 16	33%
16-24	47%
25-34	37%
35-44	50%
45-54	63%
55-64	71%
65+	67%

The lowest proportions of English learners were found in the 25-34 age group and among those under 16, although there were just three respondents in this last group, meaning that this result lacks statistical significance. It is generally felt that the quality of education has deteriorated over time, and the shortage of English teachers has grown. As such, older generations in Argentina may have received better-quality English language training than young Argentines today.

Proportion of English learners by province

Due to small samples in some provinces, it is difficult to make conclusions about how Argentina's geography relates to English language learning; however, it is evident that English is spoken more in urban areas than in rural areas. The largest share of survey respondents was from Buenos Aires province (44%), followed by Ciudad de Buenos Aires (14%) and Santa Fe (10%). There were fewer than five respondents from Catamarca, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego provinces.

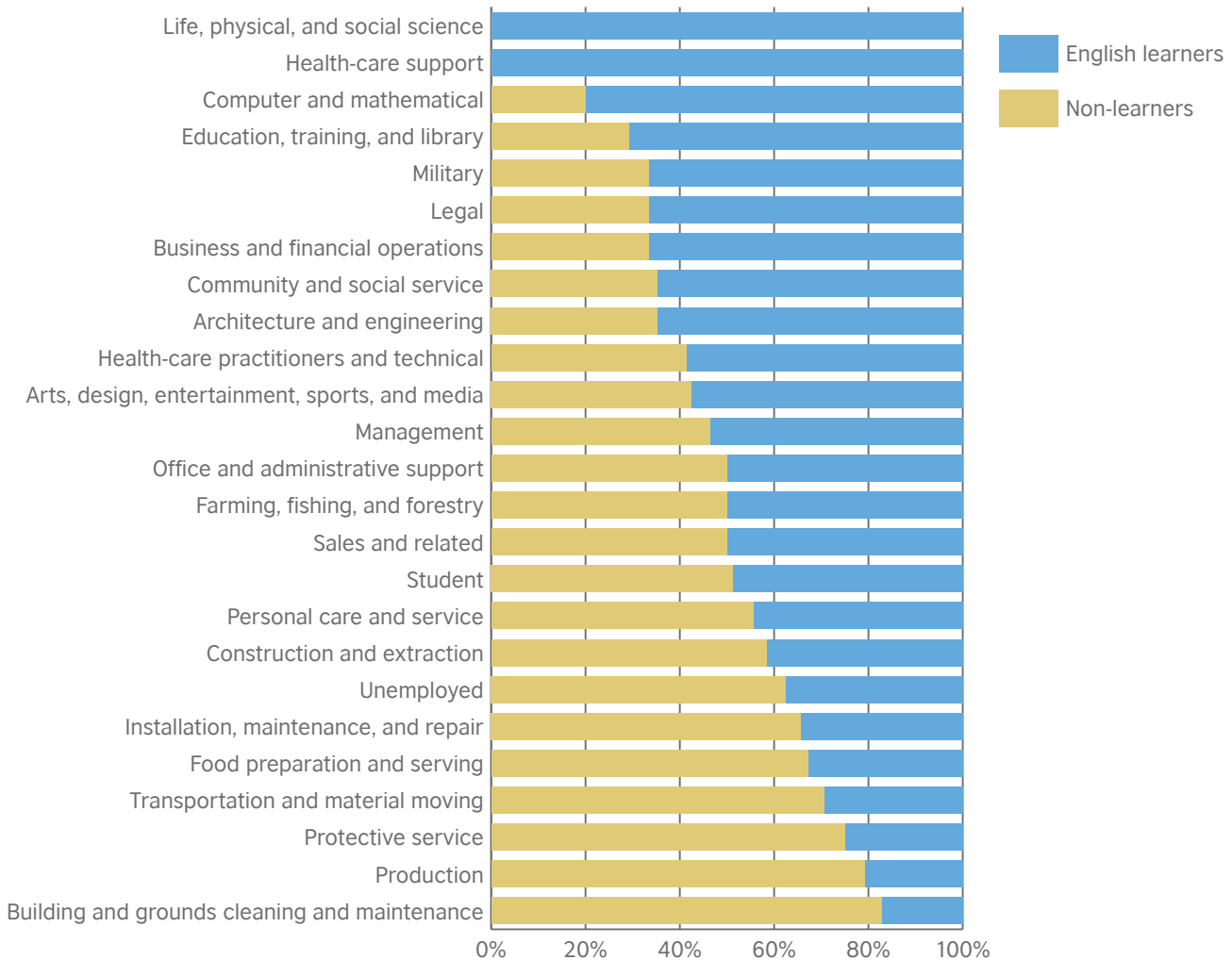
Department	Per cent of respondents that have learned English
Catamarca	100%
Santiago del Estero	75%
Ciudad de Buenos Aires	73%
San Luis	67%
Santa Cruz	67%
Chubut	58%
Tucumán	58%
Formosa	57%
San Juan	57%
Entre Ríos	50%
Jujuy	50%
Tierra del Fuego	50%
Córdoba	49%
Santa Fe	49%
Mendoza	47%
Neuquén	46%
Buenos Aires	46%
Corrientes	43%
Salta	43%
La Rioja	33%
Río Negro	33%
La Pampa	17%
Chaco	7%
Misiones	0%

Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

This chart shows the proportions of English learners in each province, as determined by our survey. The provinces with the highest proportions of English language learners were Catamarca, which had a small sample size, Santiago del Estero and Ciudad de Buenos Aires. The lowest proportions of English language learners were found in Misiones, Chaco and La Pampa.

Industry and English language learning

Respondents were asked to identify their occupation from a list of industries. This selection was then cross-referenced with respondents' experiences of English learning.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

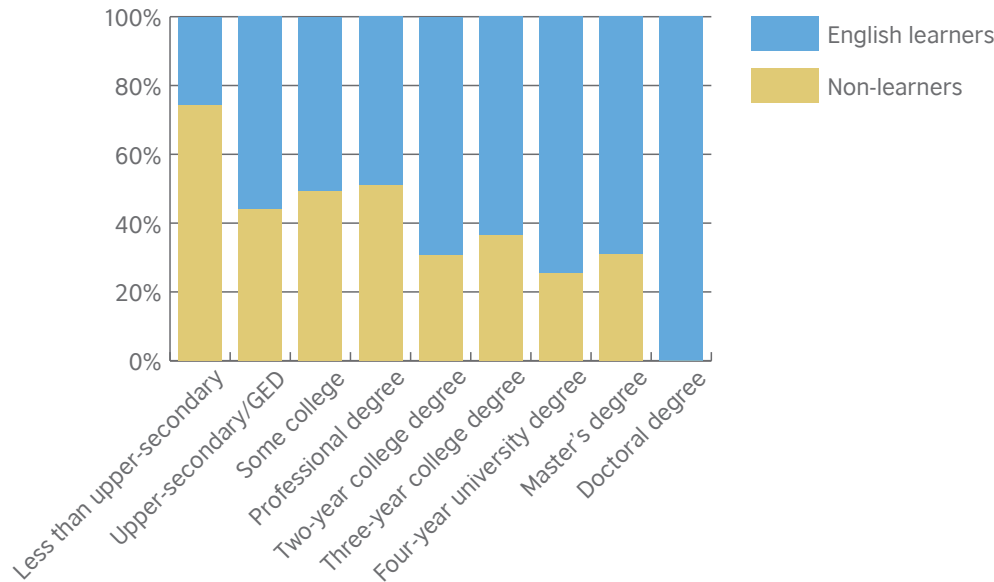
The sectors with the largest shares of English language learners were life, physical and social science (100%), health-care support (100%), computer and mathematical (80%) and education, training and library (71%). There were also large proportions of English learners in the military (67%), legal (67%) and business and financial operations (67%) sectors.

The industries with significantly higher proportions of non-learners included production (17%), building and grounds cleaning and maintenance (21%), protective service (25%) and transportation and material moving (29%) as well as among those that were unemployed (33%). It is possible that informal workers categorised themselves as unemployed. Overall, 49 per cent of students had experience with English language learning.

In general, those industries with the smallest proportions of English language learners were more labour intensive, while those with the largest proportions of English learners required higher levels of education.

Level of education and English language learning

We identified a loose positive correlation between education attainment and propensity to learn English: those with lower levels of education were less likely to be English language learners, while those with advanced degrees were more likely to have learned English.

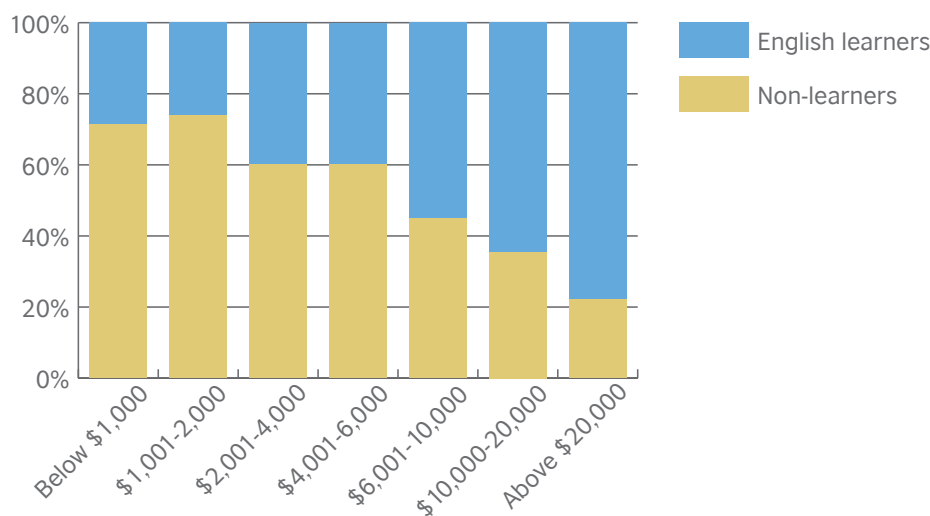


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The smallest proportions of English learners were among those with less than an upper-secondary education (26%) and those with a professional degree (51%). All of the doctoral graduates surveyed had experience with English language learning.

Household income and English language learning

There is generally a direct correlation between higher incomes and English learning in Argentina.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

We asked respondents to report their monthly income in Argentinian pesos. Interestingly, those in the lowest income bracket (less than Argentinian pesos 1,000) were slightly more likely to have studied English than those in the next income bracket (Argentinian pesos 1,000-2,000). This may be explained by the government provision of English learning services for the

most vulnerable populations.

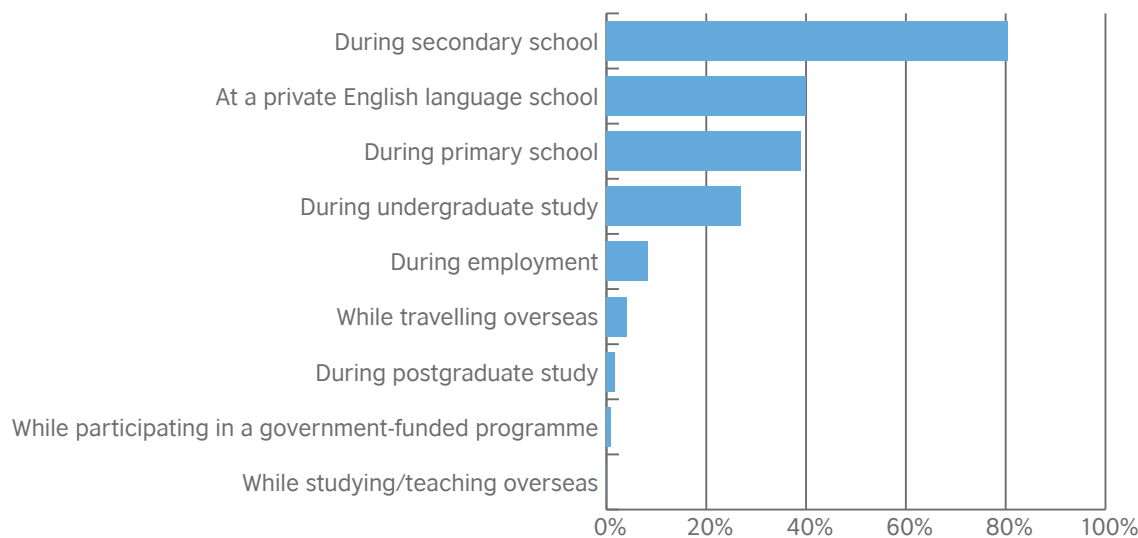
As in most non-English-speaking countries, those in higher income groups are more likely to learn English. This is because households with more disposable income are more likely to be able to afford private education and English classes as well as international travel and exposure to other cultures and technologies. English may also be a greater priority for wealthier families. Among lower income groups, there is widespread agreement about the importance of learning English, but the funds or time to dedicate to English language learning are often lacking. This reflects a lack of access to free courses and may explain low uptake of online courses.

Motivations for studying English

Among the survey respondents, 500, or around 50 per cent, stated that they had learned or were learning English. We asked this sub-group when and why they had learned English and to assess their English reading, writing and speaking skills.

When did you study English?

Respondents were asked when they had learned English. As many people use multiple pathways for language learning, participants were allowed to choose more than one answer.

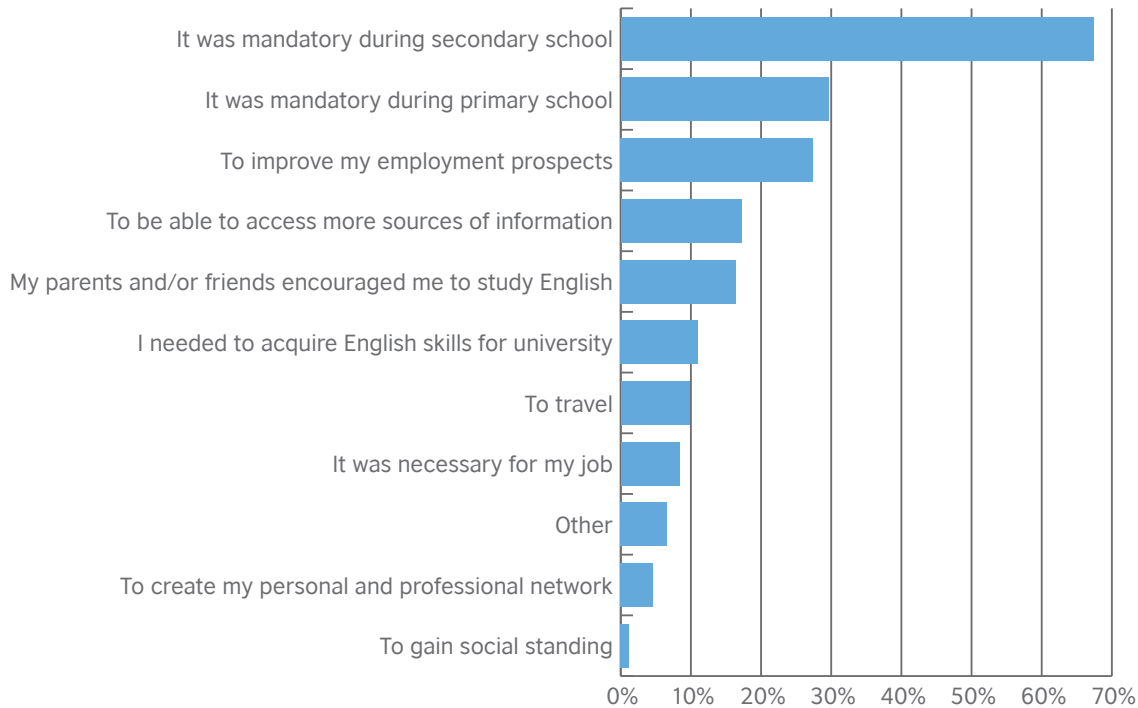


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The largest share of English learners by a long measure had studied English in secondary school (80%). Participants also indicated they had learned English at private English language schools (40%) and during primary school (39%) and undergraduate study (27%). Other pathways were comparatively unpopular: only small shares of respondents had learned English while participating in a government-funded programme (1%), during postgraduate study (2%) or while traveling overseas (4%), and no respondents had learned English while studying or teaching overseas. Interestingly, only 8 per cent of respondents had learned English while they were in the workplace.

Why did you study English?

We asked respondents why they had decided to study English. As people often have multiple reasons for learning English, respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.



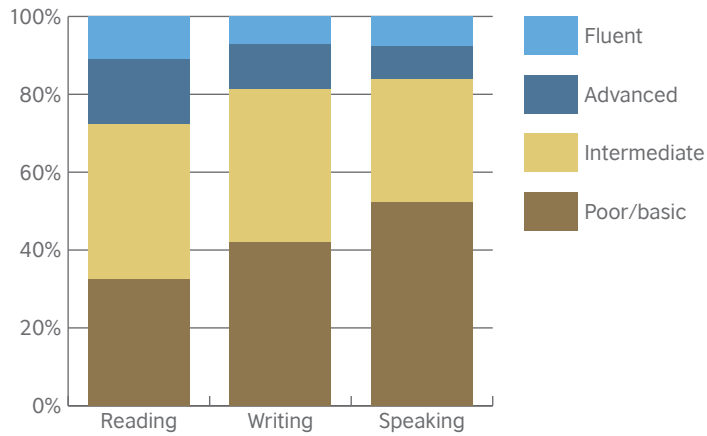
Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

English learners largely indicated that they had studied English as a mandatory course in secondary school (67%) or primary school (30%). A further large proportion learned English to improve their employment prospects (27%), although just eight per cent learned English because it was necessary for their job, compared to 11 per cent who had needed the language for university. As such, a large share of respondents felt that learning English was a useful preparatory measure.

The least likely reasons for learning English were to gain social standing (1%), to create wider networks (5%) and 'other' reasons (7%), most of which related to simply liking the language.

English proficiency

We asked respondents to evaluate their English reading, writing and speaking skills, choosing from Poor/basic, Intermediate, Advanced and fFluent.



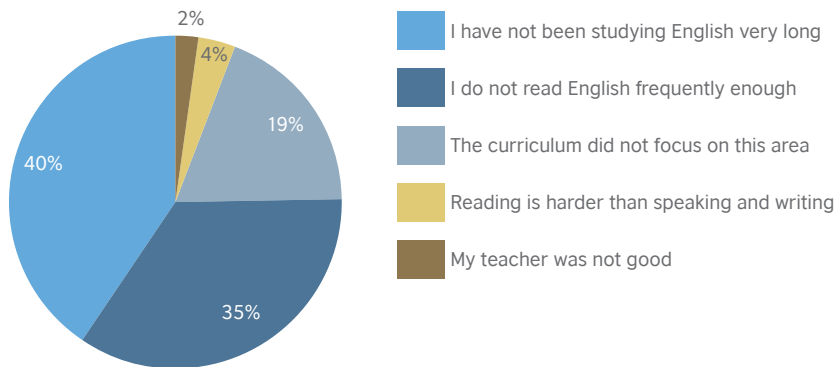
Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

While this evaluation was subjective, Argentinian English learners were largely more confident in their reading skills than in their writing and speaking skills: 28 per cent of respondents described their reading skills as Advanced or Fluent, compared to 19 per cent for writing skills and 16 per cent for speaking skills.

Of the 28 respondents who described themselves as fluent in reading, writing and speaking, the largest proportion (36%) was employed in the education, training and library sector and 29 per cent had a four-year university education.

Reading skills in English

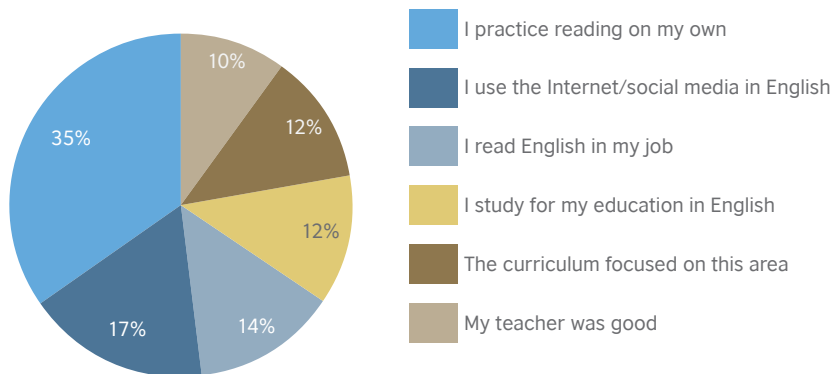
We asked respondents who evaluated their reading skills as Poor/basic or Intermediate why they felt their skills were lacking.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The largest share of respondents (40%) attributed this to the fact that they had not been studying English very long, while a further 35 per cent said that their did not read English frequently enough. A small share of respondents felt that this was because reading is harder than speaking or writing (4%), while more than one in five attributed their weak skills to factors beyond their control, such as the curriculum (19%) and teachers (2%).

We then asked those with Advanced or Fluent reading skills why they felt their skills were so good.

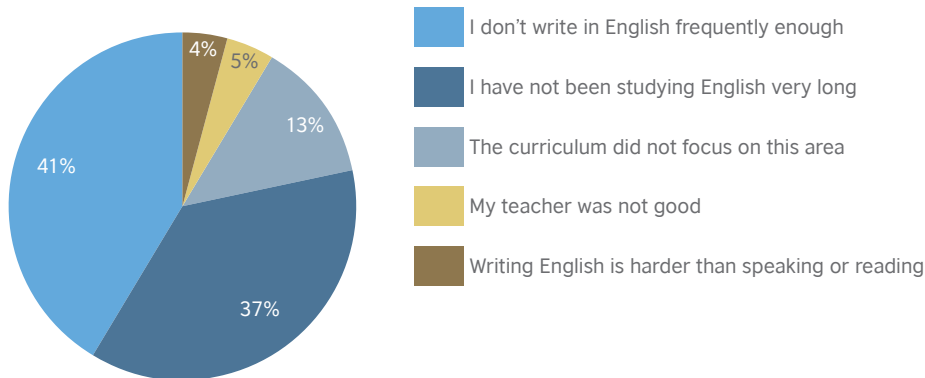


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Overall, respondents felt that their good reading skills were largely a product of their own efforts as opposed to the strengths or weaknesses of their teachers or education. The largest shares attributed their skills to reading English on their own (35%), using the Internet and social media in English (17%), reading in English as part of their job (14%) and studying for an academic course in English (12%). Smaller shares attributed their skills to the curriculum (12%) and their teachers (10%).

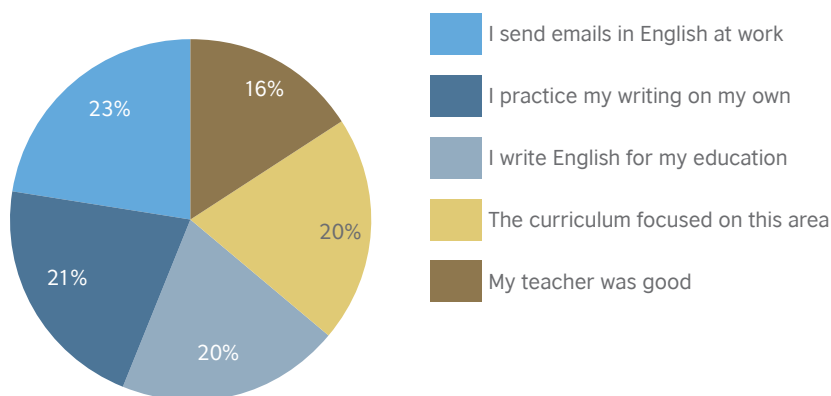
Writing skills in English

We asked respondents who evaluated their writing skills as Poor/basic or Intermediate why they felt their skills were lacking.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The largest share of respondents (41%) attributed this to not writing in English often enough (41%), while 37 per cent said this was because they had not been studying the language long enough. Smaller percentages attributed their weak writing skills to unbalanced curriculums (13%) and poor teachers (5%), while four per cent felt that it was because writing was harder than speaking or reading.

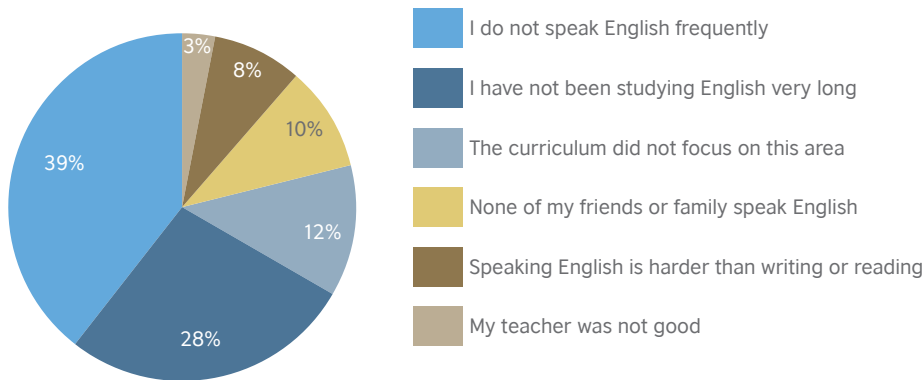


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Those who were confident in their English writing skills attributed this to a wide range of reasons: 23 per cent to writing English emails at work, 21 per cent to practising writing independently and 20 per cent to writing in English for an academic course. More than one in three attributed their skills to strong curriculums (20%) and good teachers (16%).

Speaking skills in English

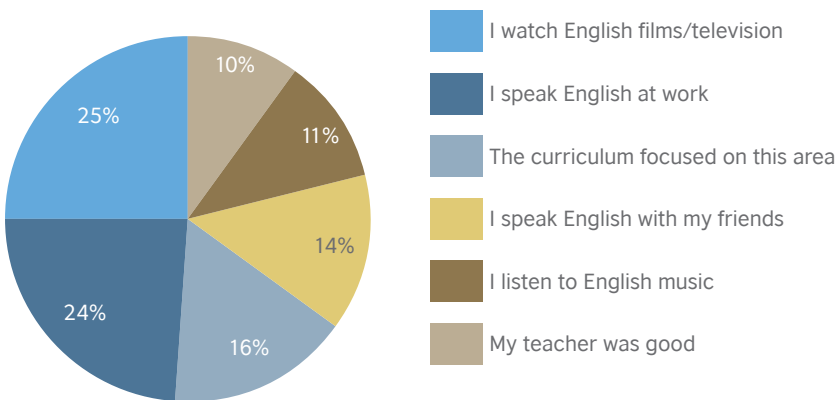
We asked respondents who evaluated their speaking skills as Poor/basic or Intermediate why they felt their skills were lacking.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The largest shares of respondents attributed this to not speaking English frequently enough (39%) and not having been studying English for very long (28%). Smaller shares of respondents attributed this to factors out of their control, such as the curriculum not focusing on speaking (12%), none of their family or friends speaking English (10%) and poor teachers (3%). A further eight per cent felt this was because speaking was more difficult than reading or writing.

Of the 15 per cent of who attributed their weak speaking skills to the curriculum or teachers, 94 per cent learned English in secondary school, 36 per cent learned in primary school, 20 per cent learned in private language schools and 20 per cent learned at university during an undergraduate course.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

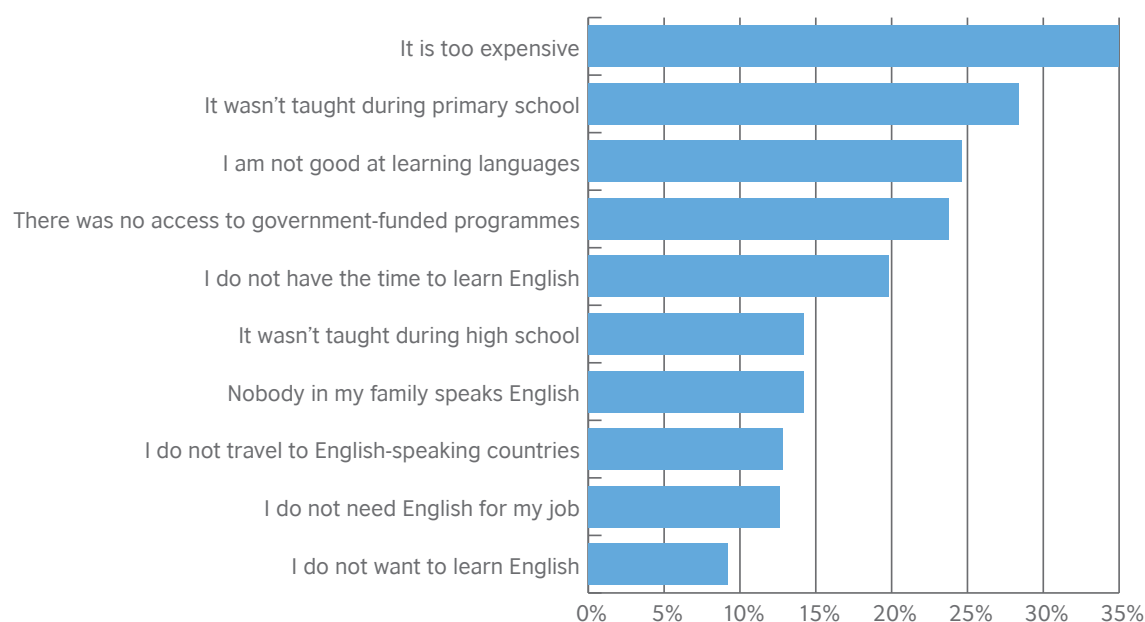
Large shares of those that felt confident in their English speaking (advanced and fluent) said that it was due to watching English language films and television (25%), speaking English at work (24%), speaking English with friends (14%) and listening to English music (11%), while 16 per cent attributed this to a strong curriculum and 10 per cent credited this to good teachers.

Barriers to studying English

We asked the 501 respondents who had not learned English about their experiences with the language and what might encourage them to learn the language in the future.

Why haven't you learned English?

Survey participants could choose multiple answers



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The top reason for respondents not to learn English was the cost: 35 per cent of non-learners said that it was too expensive. Other major barriers included that it wasn't taught in primary school (28%), that they felt they were not good at learning languages (25%), a lack of access to government-funded programmes (24%) and a lack of time (20%).

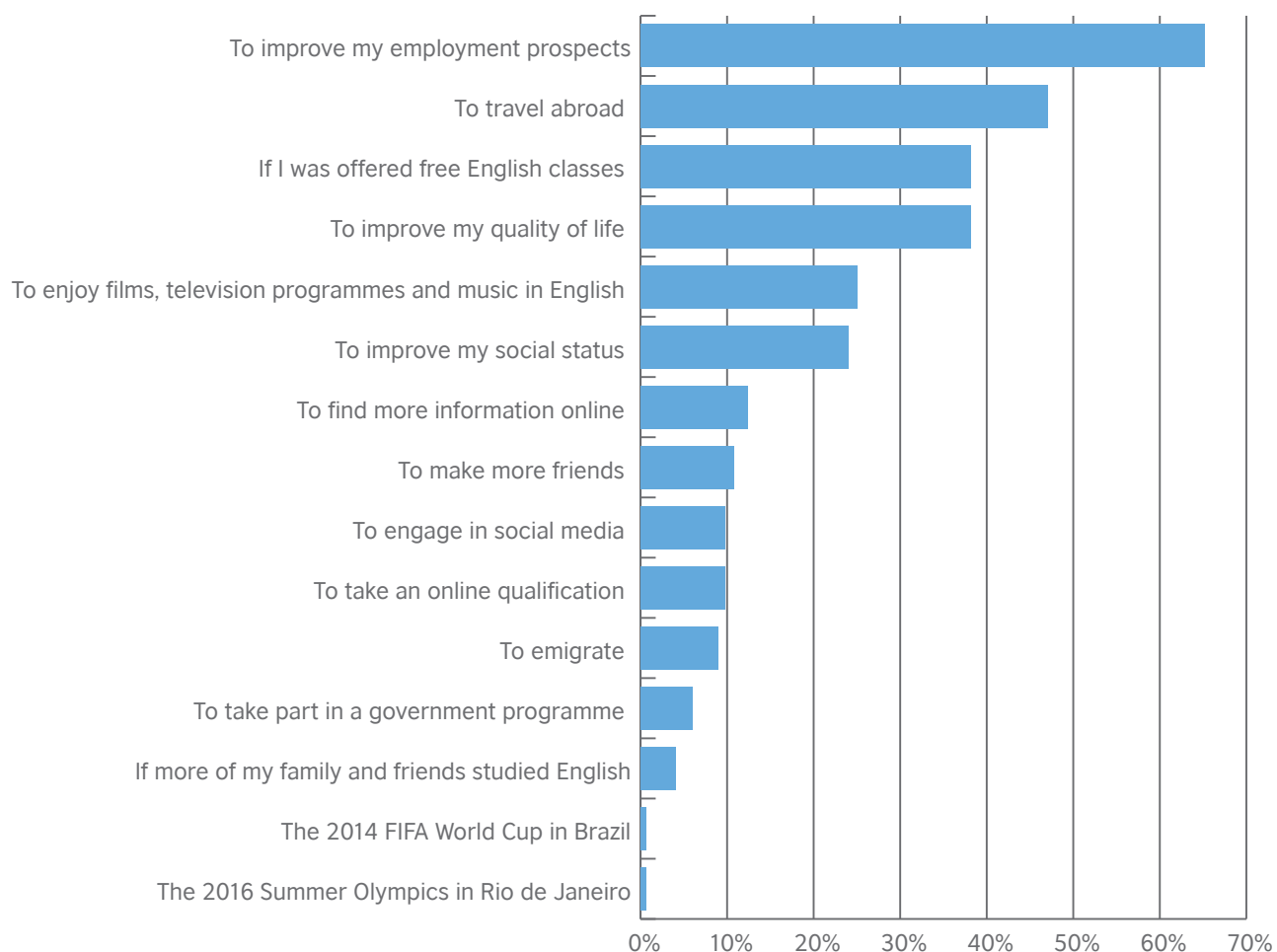
Other reasons included not needing English for their job (13%), not traveling to English-speaking countries (13%), respondents' families not speaking English (14%) and that it wasn't taught during secondary school (14%).

Overall, almost one in ten non-learners (9%) had no desire to learn English. Among this group, 39 per cent were unemployed and 50 per cent had less than a secondary education; the respondents in this group were fairly evenly spread over the different income strata.

Of the 175 respondents who stated that English was too expensive, 15 per cent were unemployed and 17 per cent were students; almost 50 per cent had less than a secondary education but still had average levels of income. This breakdown reveals that English language learning may be prohibitively expensive for those with lower levels of education who are studying, unemployed or employed in the informal sector.

What could motivate you to start learning English?

Non-learners were asked what could incentivise them to start learning English.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

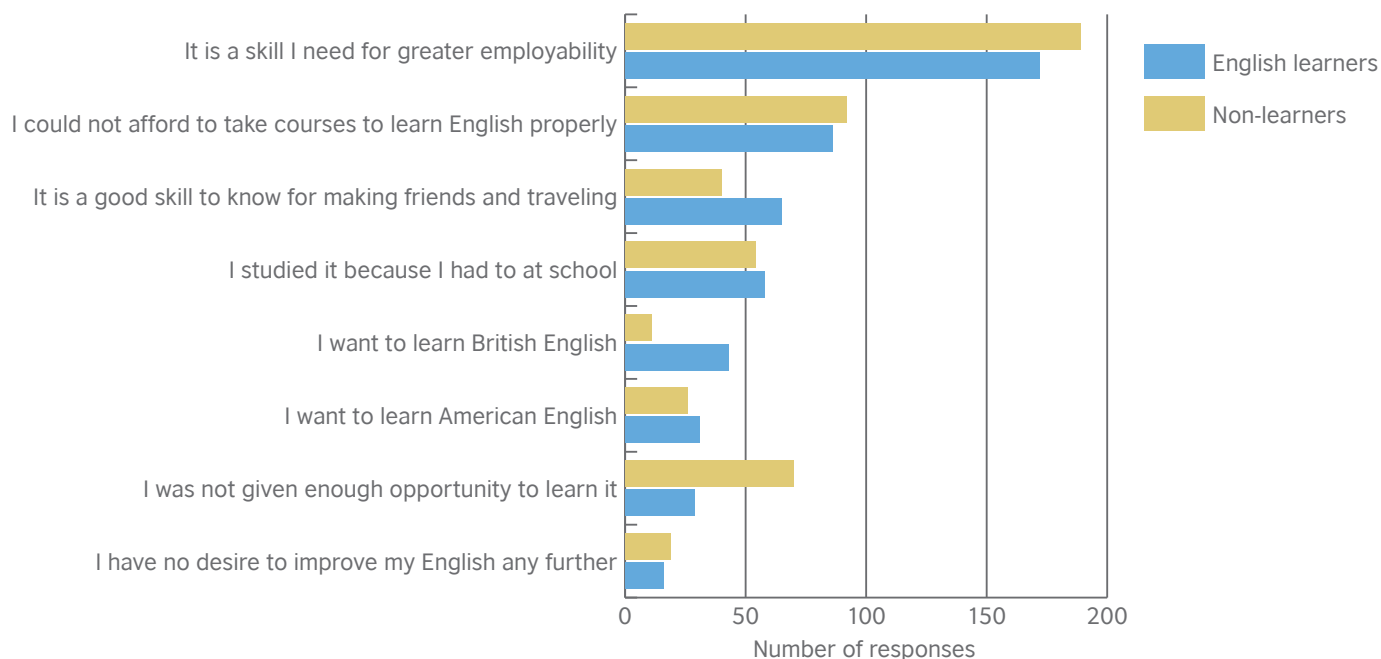
The largest share of respondents (65%) would be motivated to learn English if they knew it would improve their employment prospects. Other key incentives included to travel abroad (47%) and to improve quality of life (38%). More than one in three (38%) said they would be motivated by free English classes.

Very few people said that international sporting events in the region would be motivating factors, while smaller shares cited more friends and family speaking English (4%), taking part in a government programme (6%), to emigrate (9%), to take an online course (10%) or to engage in social media (10%) as potential motivating factors.

Incentives linked to media and technology, including enjoying English-medium programming, e-learning and social media, were only moderate drivers for English language learning compared to the major factors of improved employment and travel benefits.

Views on learning English

Both English learners and non-learners were asked their views on learning English. Respondents could choose the one view that they most identified with.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

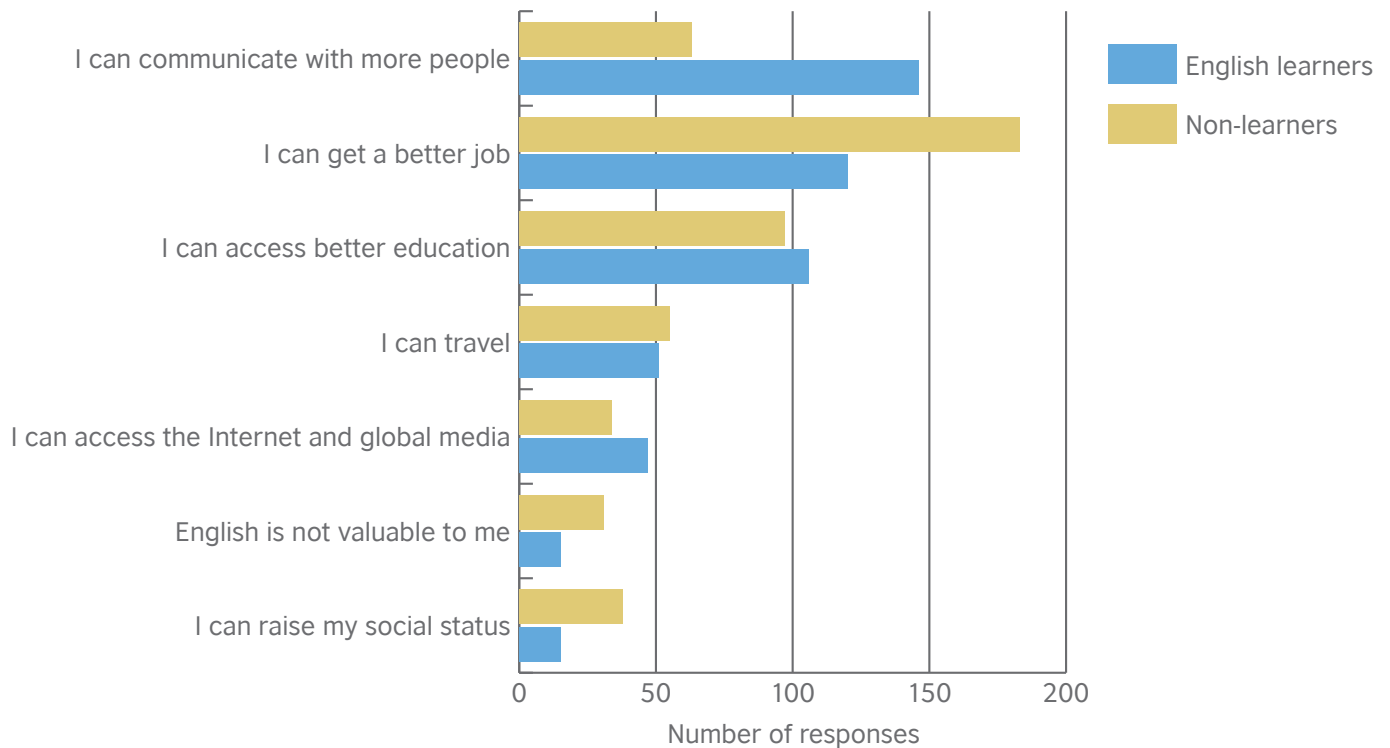
Both English learners and non-learners strongly held the view that English was a necessary skill for employability (34% and 38%, respectively). Similarly, both groups felt strongly that they could not afford to undertake the necessary English language training (17% and 18%, respectively). This indicates that even those that have learned English feel their development has been limited as a result of cost. Among these English learners, 19 per cent were unemployed, while 17 per cent worked in education, training and library and 14 per cent worked in management. As both of these career paths are associated with high demand for English language skills, this may have created a belief among these respondents that their English skills were not advanced enough and further training was necessary. This group was generally well educated, most having learned English in secondary school and completed a four-year degree, and tended to belong to the middle- to upper-income groups.

Overall, 6 per cent of learners and 14 per cent of non-learners felt that they did not have sufficient opportunities to learn English. Of these non-learners, most were unemployed (33%) and had less than a secondary education (50%) but belonged to the middle-income group. It is possible that this group contains individuals involved in the informal economy and those without the time and means to access English language learning.

Among English learners, 13 per cent felt that English was a good skill for making friends and traveling, while 12 per cent associated English with a mandatory school subject. Just three per cent of English learners and four per cent of non-learners expressed the view that they had no desire to further their English language skills.

The value of learning English

We asked English learners and non-learners to identify the one main value they placed on English language learning.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The main value of English for English learners was the ability to communicate with more people (29%); however, this value was shared by just 13 per cent of non-learners. Among non-learners, the greatest value of English was to increase employability (37%), while just 24 per cent of learners prioritised this value. This suggests that there may be some disparity between the belief that English improves employability and the reality. These non-learners were mostly middle-income students or unemployed persons with less than a secondary education, while learners who valued English for employability belonged to middle- and upper-middle-income groups and were students or managers that had either completed secondary school or had a college or university degree.

English learners were slightly more likely to place value on access to better education (21%), potentially abroad as well as at home, than non-learners (19%). Conversely, non-learners were more likely to value English as a tool for improving social status (8% compared to 3% for English learners).

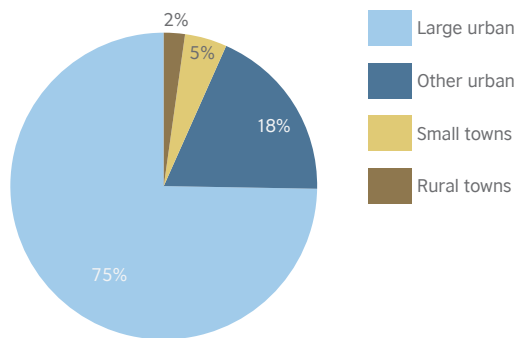
Overall, three per cent of English learners and six per cent of non-learners felt that English had no value to them. Most of these English learners learned the language because it was mandatory in secondary school, while most of these non-learners hadn't learned English because they did not want to, they felt they weren't good at learning languages and they didn't have time.

Employer demand for English

We surveyed 130 employers from different industries to better understand the relationship between employers, employment and English language acquisition.

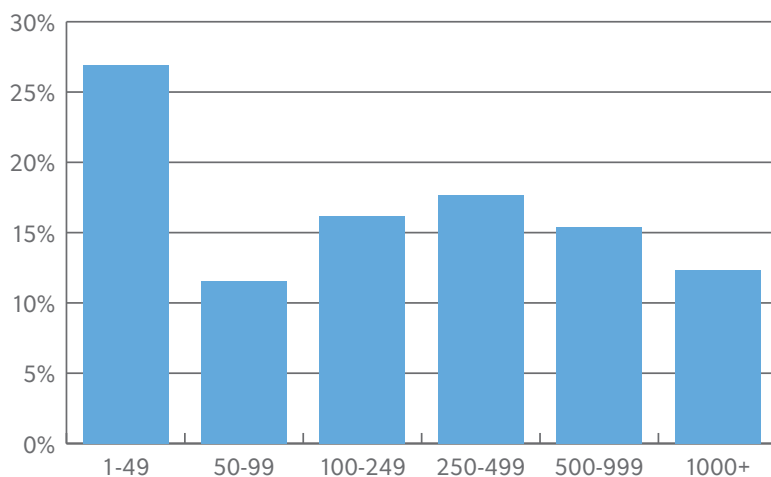
Employer profile

The businesses surveyed tended to be located in Buenos Aires city and province, although there was also representation from employers in Cordoba, Santa Fe, Neuquén, Tucuman and Mendoza, among others.



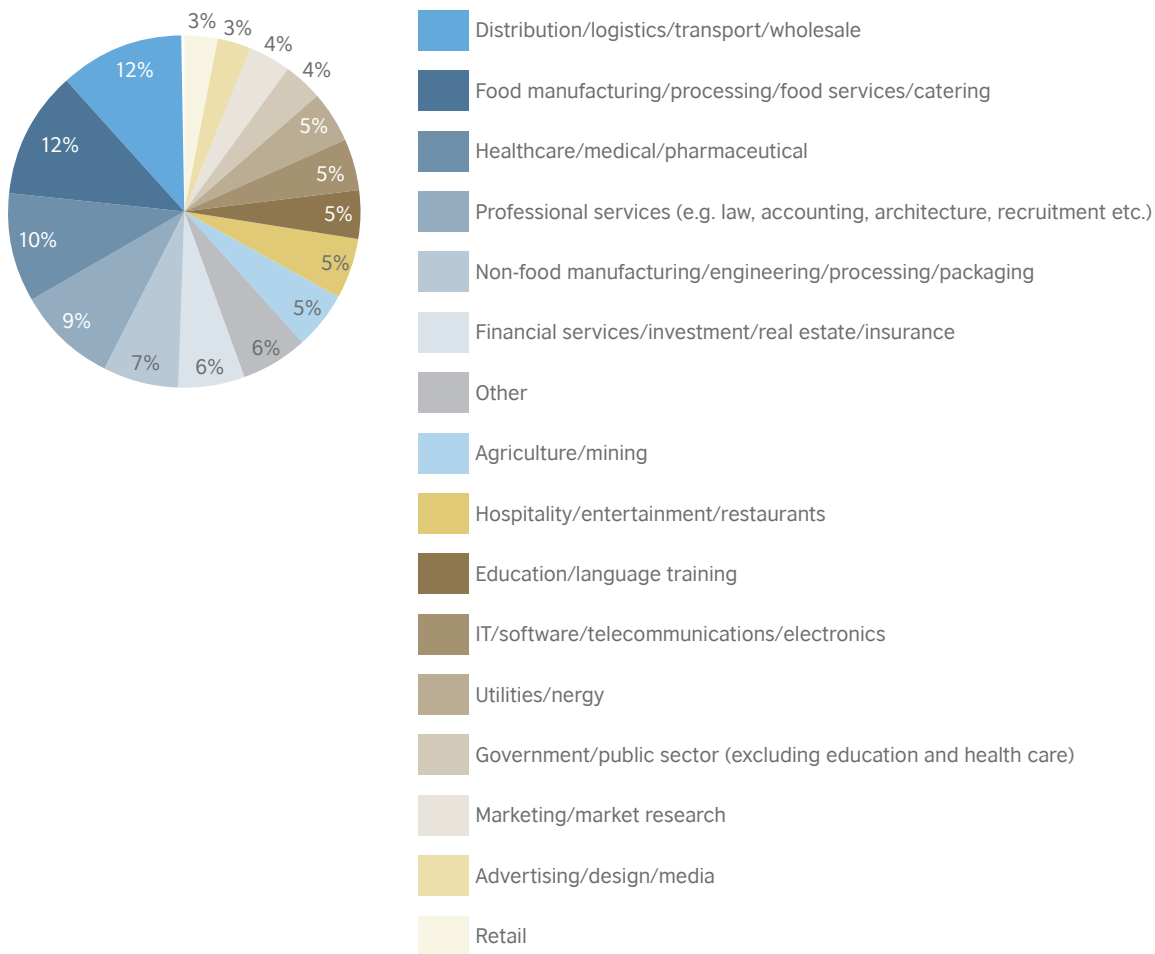
Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Most of the companies were located in large urban areas (75%), although there was also representation from employers in other urban areas (18%), small towns (5%) and rural towns (2%).



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The companies varied in size but most had fewer than 50 employees; just 12 per cent employed more than 1,000 people.

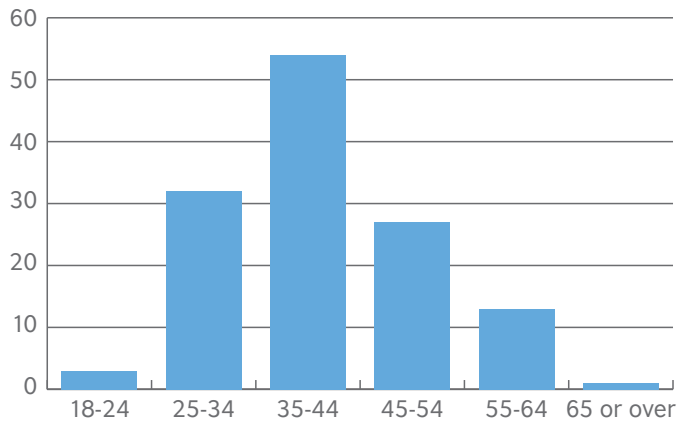


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The respondents represented a wide range of industries, including distribution, logistics, transport and wholesale (12%), food manufacturing, processing, food services and catering (12%), health care, medical and pharmaceutical (10%) and professional services (9%).

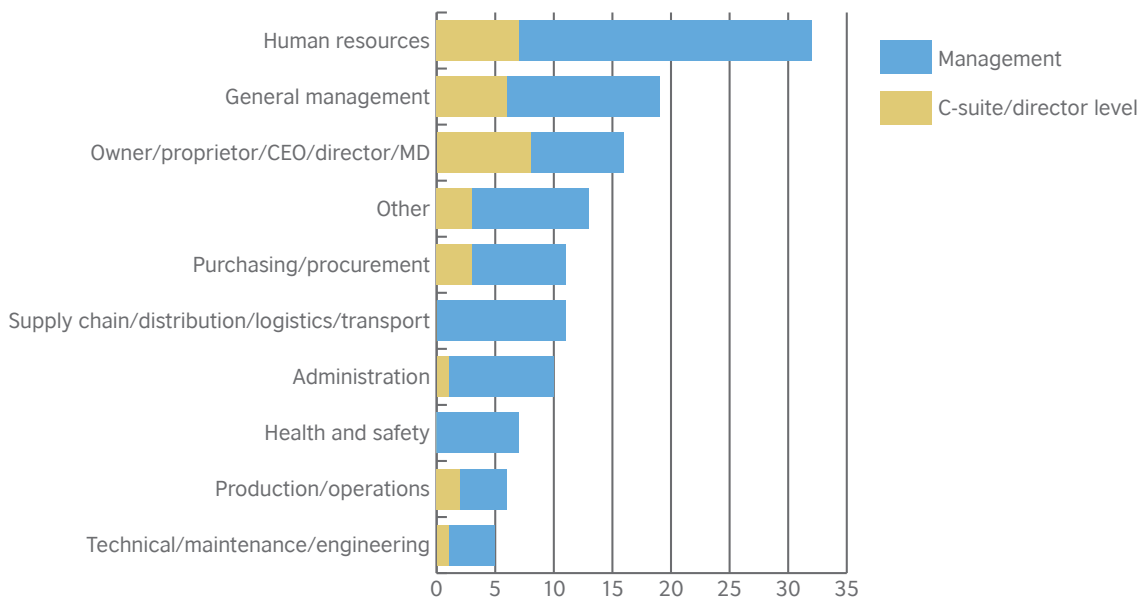
Management profile

Respondents were employed at the time of the survey at the managerial or executive level, meaning that they had attained high employment status that others often aspire to. Of the 130 respondents, 24 per cent were directors and 52 per cent were female.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Most of these employers (54%) were aged 35-44, while other large shares were aged 25-34 (32%) and 45-54 (27%). Just one respondent was aged over 64.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

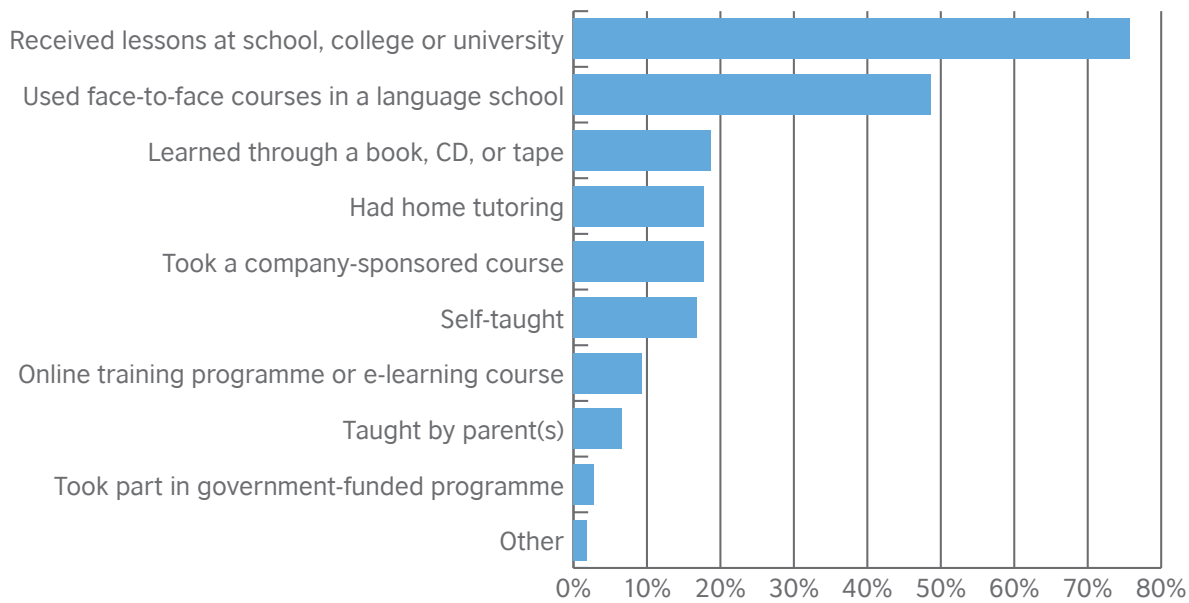
The dominant job function among employers was human resources (25%), followed by general management (15%) and owner, proprietor, CEO, director and managing director (12%). Around 10 per cent represented other job functions, including communications and sales.

Of all the respondents, 82 per cent had learned English. This proportion was higher among directors than among managers.

Basic	24%
Proficient	41%
Fluent	35%

Among English learners, the largest share of respondents evaluated their language skills as proficient (41%), while 35 per cent classified themselves as fluent and 24 per cent felt their skills were basic.

Where did you learn English?



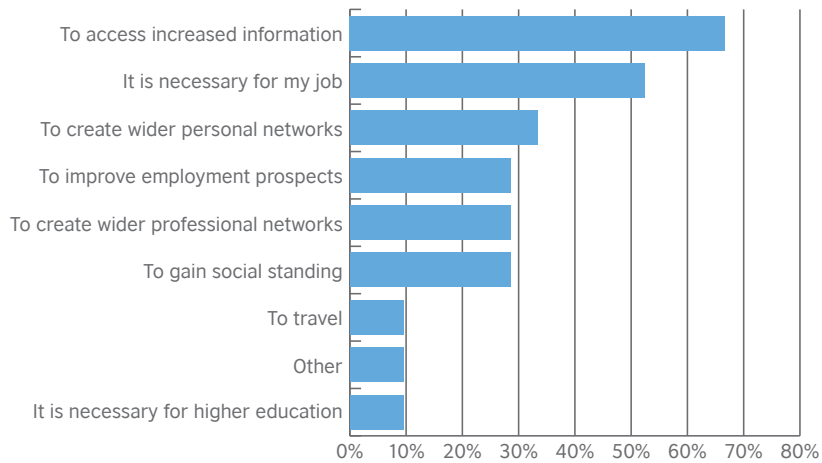
Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The 107 English-speaking employers were asked where they had learned English. The largest proportion (76%) learned at school, college or university, while nearly half used face-to-face courses at private language schools. Less common answers included online training (9%), being taught by parents (7%), taking government-funded programmes (3%) and others (2%), which included learning through reading or traveling.

Around 15-20 per cent of respondents had learned English via CD, book or tape, home tutoring, a company-sponsored course or self-study.

Of the 18 per cent of employers that had not learned English, just two individuals (8.7%) stated that they would not like to learn English. We asked the 21 non-learners who stated that they would like to learn English their reasons for this.

Why do you want to improve your English?



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Around two thirds of this group stated that they would learn to access more information and just over half stated that it was necessary for their jobs. Less common responses included that it was necessary for higher education, to travel or for other reasons such as personal development. No respondents said they wanted to learn English because their family and friends spoke the language.

Employer use of English

To better understand how English is used in the Argentinian workplace, we asked employers about the languages used internally and externally in their company.

Languages used internally

Spanish	98%
English	35%
Portuguese	3%

Nearly all companies speak Spanish internally (98%), but 35 per cent of employers stated that they use English internally and three per cent use Portuguese, reflecting business partnerships with Brazil.

Food manufacturing/processing/food services/catering	18%
Non-food manufacturing/engineering/processing/packaging	11%
Professional services (e.g. law, accounting, architecture, recruitment etc.)	11%
Distribution/logistics/transport/wholesale	9%
Financial services/investment/real estate/insurance	9%
Health care/medical/pharmaceutical	9%
Agriculture/mining	7%
Marketing/market research	7%
Government/public sector (excluding education and health care)	4%
Retail	4%
Utilities/energy	4%
Advertising/design/media	2%
Hospitality/entertainment/restaurants	2%
Other	2%

The 45 companies that used English internally spanned a variety of industries, including food manufacturing, processing, food services, catering (18%), non-food manufacturing, engineering, processing and packaging (11%) and professional services (11%).

Languages used externally

Spanish	83%
English	75%
Portuguese	8%
German	2%
French	2%
Italian	1%
Japanese	1%
Russian	1%

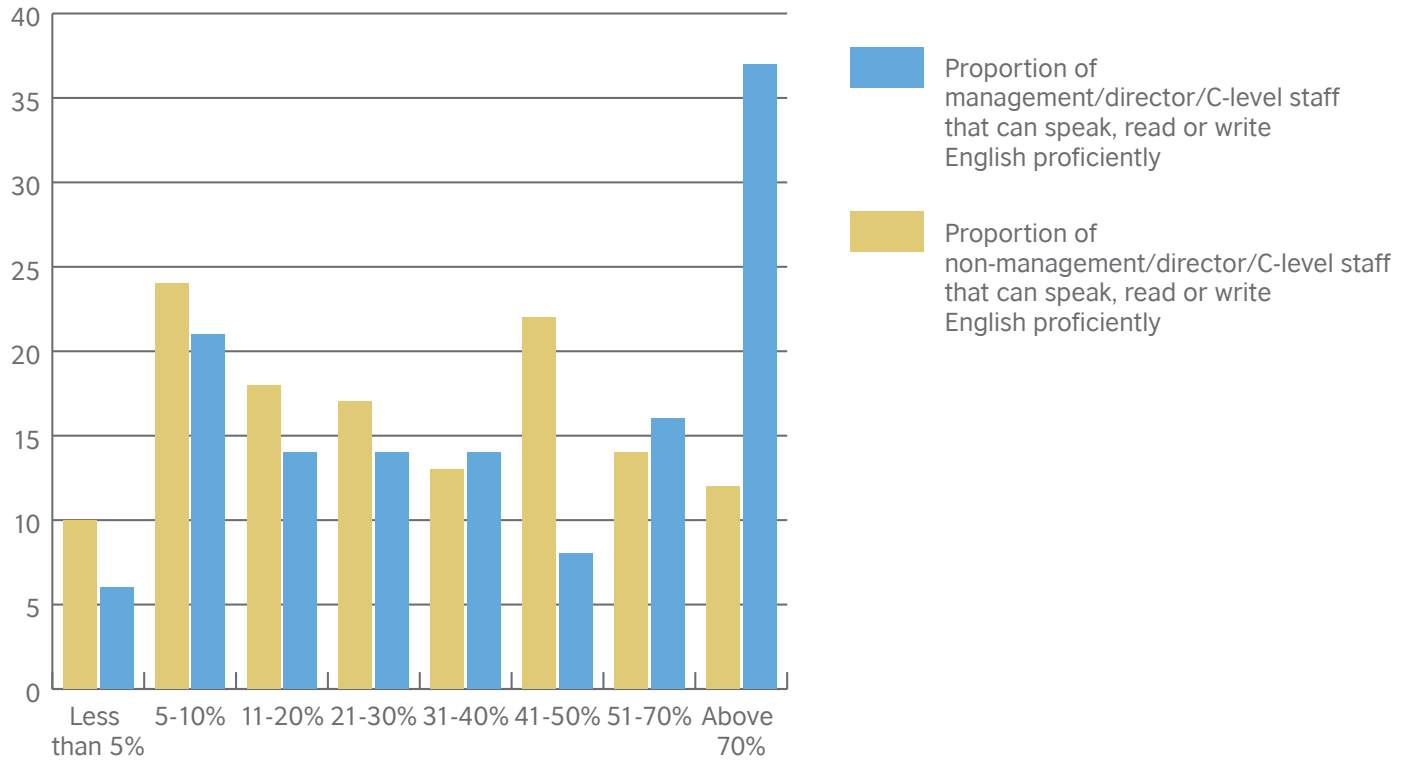
The languages spoken externally were more varied and included Spanish (83%), English (75%), Portuguese (8%), German (2%), Italian (1%), Japanese (1%) and Russian (1%).

Food manufacturing/processing/food services/catering	12%
Distribution/logistics/transport/wholesale	11%
Non-food manufacturing/engineering/processing/packaging	8%
Financial services/investment/real estate/insurance	7%
Health care/medical/pharmaceutical	7%
Professional services (e.g. law, accounting, architecture, recruitment etc.)	7%
IT/software/telecommunications/electronics	6%
Other, please state	6%
Agriculture/mining	5%
Government/public sector (excluding education and health care)	5%
Marketing/market research	5%
Advertising/design/media	4%
Hospitality/entertainment/restaurants	4%
Retail	4%
Utilities/energy	4%
Education/language training	3%

The 98 companies that used English externally included those from food manufacturing, processing, food services, catering (12%), distribution, logistics, transport and wholesale (11%) and non-food manufacturing, engineering, processing and packaging (8%). Interestingly, just 5 per cent were in government and the public sector and 4 per cent were in education and language training - the two industries with the highest proportions of English learners in our survey of the general population.

Employee English proficiency

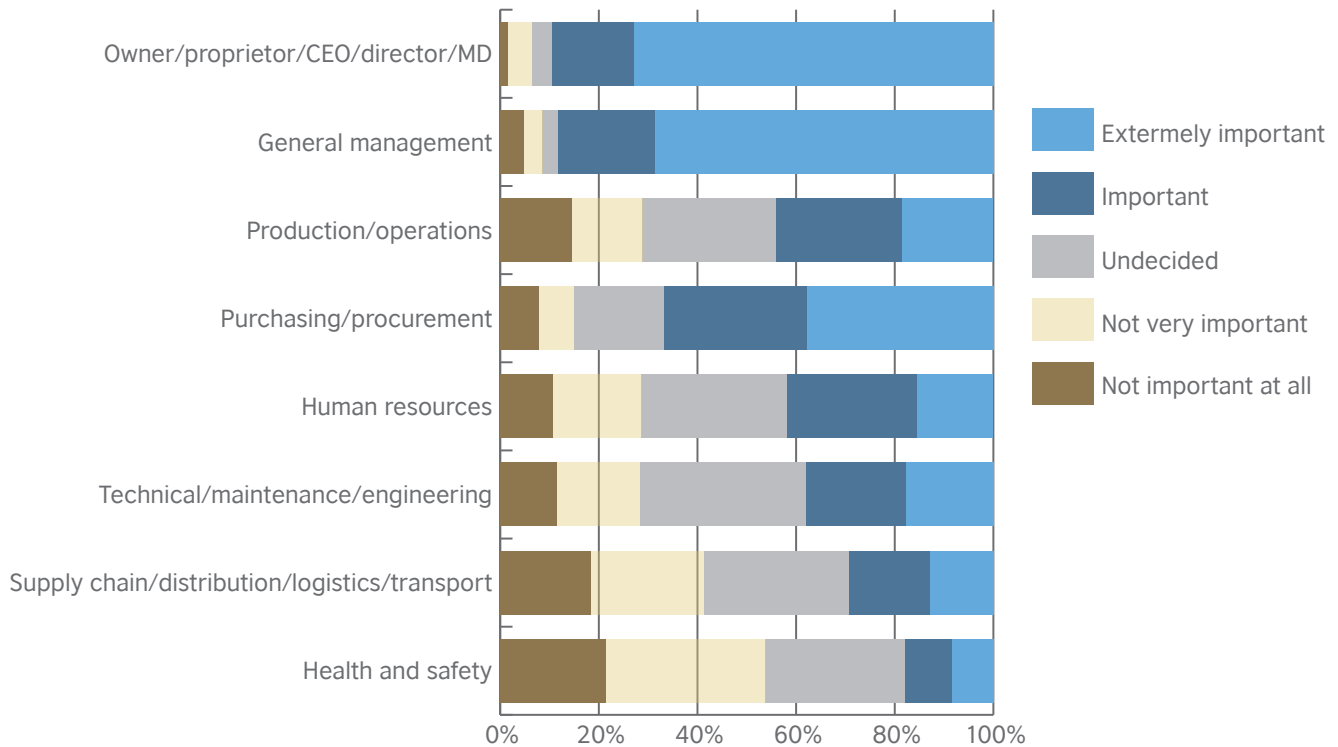
We asked employers to evaluate the English skills of their peers and employees.



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The largest share of employers stated that over 70 per cent of management was proficient in English. However, there was significantly more variation in the English skills of non-management staff: the proportion of non-management staff that were proficient in English ranged from around 10-50 per cent.

The importance of English by job function

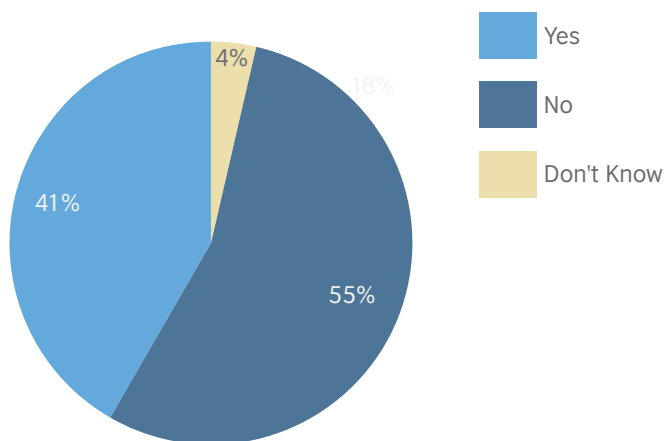


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

We asked employers how important English was for certain job functions in their companies. The vast majority of respondents (90%) stated that it was important or extremely important for the owner, proprietor, CEO, director or MD to speak English, and 79 per cent felt the same about general management. The sample was fairly evenly divided on whether English was necessary for those in human resources and technical, maintenance and engineering positions, and English was generally thought to be less essential in roles in health and safety and supply chain, distribution, logistics and transport.

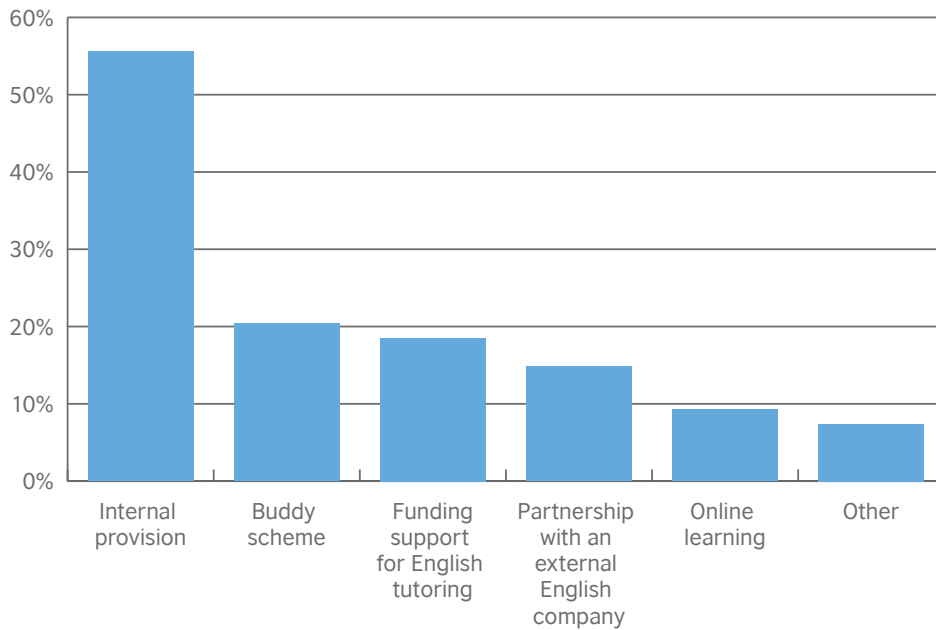
Job function aside, it would appear that demand for English language skills in the workplace is growing, particularly in terms of speaking skills.

Does your company offer English language training and development?



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Respondents were asked if their company offered any form of English language training and development, and 55 per cent of employers reported that they did not.

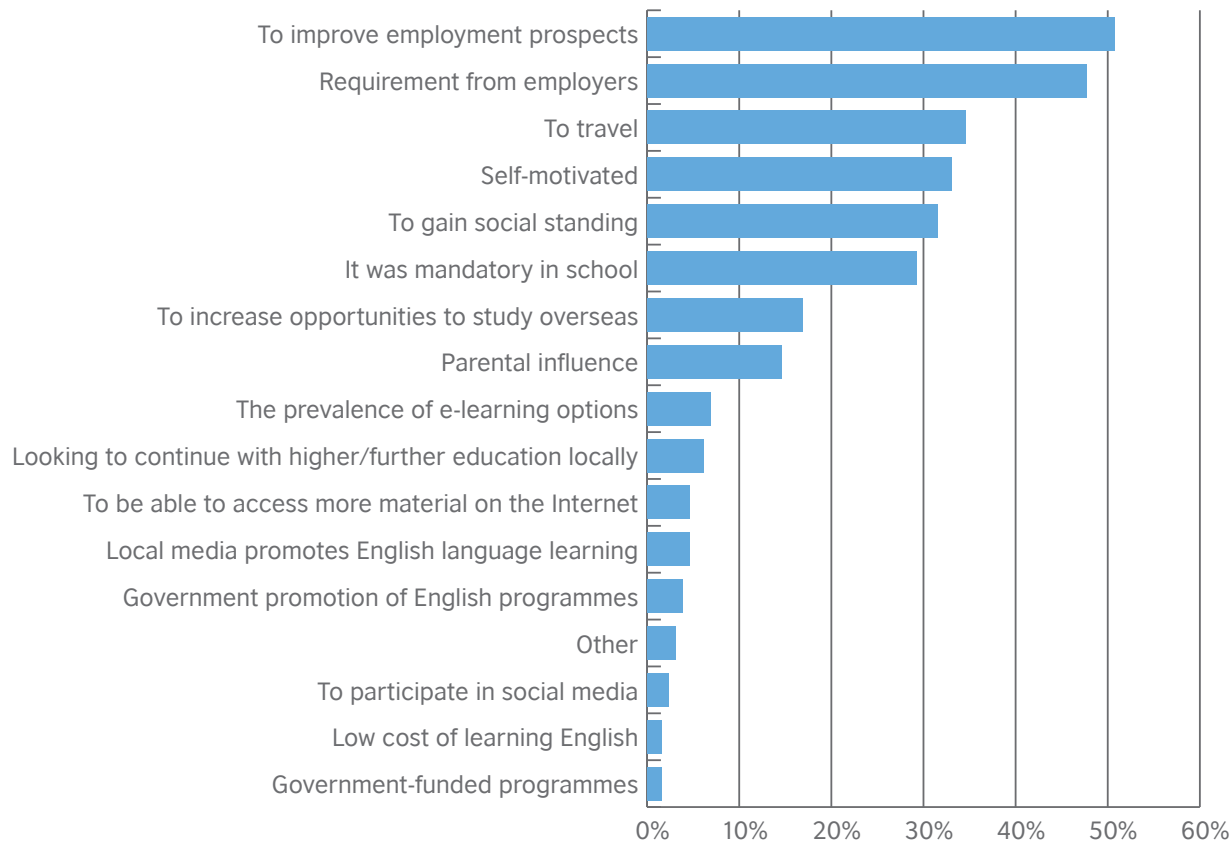


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

Of the 54 employers (41%) that did offer English training, 56 per cent did so internally. Other methods included the buddy scheme (20%), financial support for English classes (19%), partnerships with external English training companies (15%) and online learning (9%). Other options (7%) often included one-to-one tutoring with an English teacher, which could fall under a number of the other categories.

Employer views on factors affecting English learning

We asked respondents their personal views (as opposed to general company views) on the main reason for Argentines to want to learn English. Respondents could choose up to three responses.

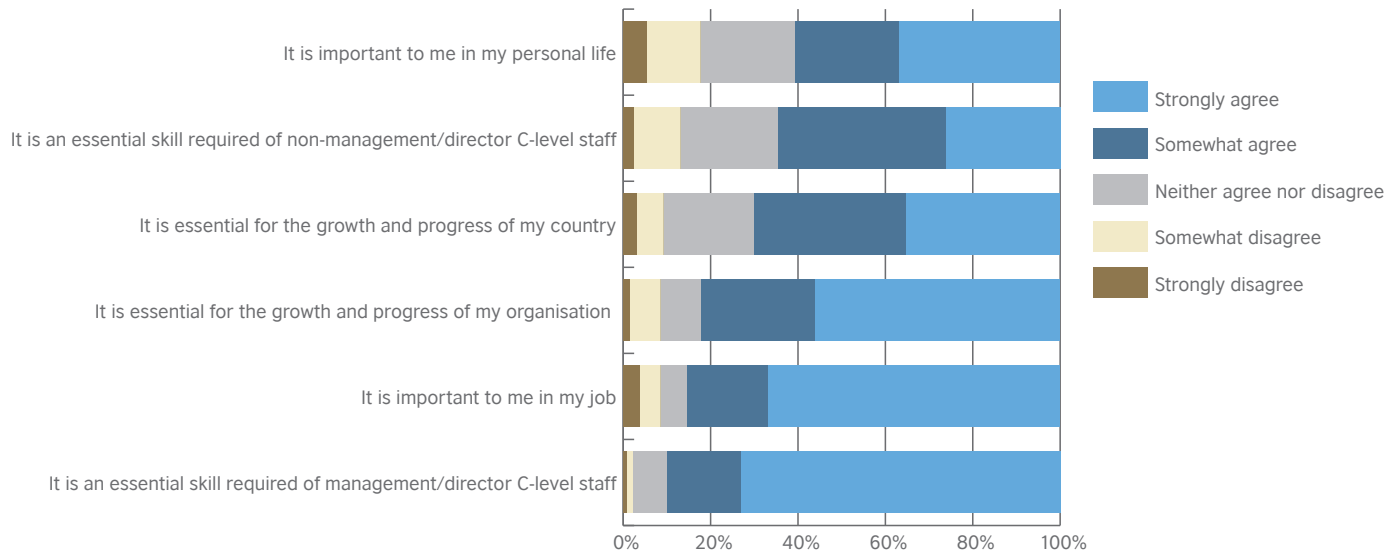


Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

The largest shares of respondents indicated that people learned English to improve their employment prospects (51%) and because it was required by employers (48%). Other prominent responses included to travel (35%), self-motivation (33%) and the desire to raise social standing (32%). Factors related to school and study included that it was mandatory in school (29%), to increase opportunities to study abroad (17%) and parental influence (15%). All other factors were comparatively unpopular.

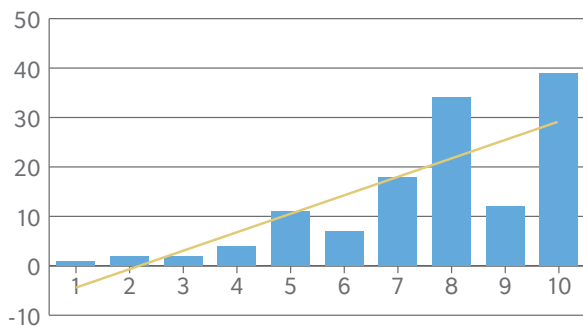
As such, we can conclude that employers feel that the drivers most likely to incentivise people to learn English are associated closely with employability and self-improvement.

The importance of English



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

To further understand these views, respondents were presented with a series of statements on how essential English is. While the majority of respondents agreed with all of the statements, there was some variation in their responses. Respondents were more likely to agree that English is an essential skill for management and executive staff (90%), followed by that it is important for his or her job (85%) and that it is essential for the growth of the organisation (82%). There was less agreement on whether English was essential for national prosperity (70%), was an essential skill for non-management staff (65%) and was important in individuals’ personal lives (61%).



Source: British Council, Education Intelligence, Latin America Databank 2015

We asked employers to rate the importance of English knowledge on a scale from one (not important) to ten (essential). Respondents were most likely to rate English as essential (ten) or very important (eight). Among those that rated English as essential, almost a quarter were in the food manufacturing, processing, food services and catering sector. Just one respondent felt that it was not important for workers to acquire English. Overall, the results show a strong, clear trend of English being an important and valued skill among managers and directors.



To better understand why employers place value on English, we asked respondents to explain why they thought English was or was not essential. The above word cloud is representative of the answers received: the size of a word signifies how frequently respondents used it in their answers. The words that were most prominent, besides ‘English’, were ‘language’, ‘company’, ‘need’, ‘important’, ‘work’, ‘customers’ and ‘today’. This word cloud underlines the belief among Argentinian employers that English is essential and immediately necessary in today’s global workplace.

Factors affecting English language learning

Teaching training

The shortage of qualified teachers is one of the major factors affecting English language learning in Argentina. There are insufficient properly trained teachers to meet the high demand for English. Although the country has a long tradition of English language teacher training, standards vary from one province to another and there is a need for more quality assurance. The large number of teachers that are not properly qualified or are teaching outside their areas of expertise is effectively hindering the English language learning process and having a negative effect on the learning experience. This is exacerbated by the prevalence of trainee teachers in schools, who are often inexperienced. Qualified teachers tend to work in bigger cities, meaning that aspiring students in smaller towns and rural areas often don't receive quality teaching. English language learning is also affected by factors such as teacher absenteeism, large class sizes and a shortage of resources.

There is concern that the highly inclusive nature of the national standards is affecting the quality of education and English-language teaching. Inclusive entrance requirements mean that trainee English language teachers are coming increasingly from lower socio-economic groups, which generally receive lower-quality teaching and demonstrate weaker English and academic skills. Often, trainee teachers don't complete their studies and yet still go on to teach, perpetuating the cycle of poorly qualified teachers and inadequately taught students. To supplement low salaries, many teachers work on the side, and the formal education system suffers as a result. The term 'taxi teacher' is used to describe teachers who spend the day teaching in different schools, as this often enables them to earn a decent wage.

The teaching profession is widely thought to be undervalued and underpaid; teachers receive little respect and sometimes serve more as social workers and facilitators than as teachers, especially in vulnerable areas. Although teacher associations are active, their activities focus more on economic goals and tend not to affect policy. Low teacher involvement means that teachers are sometimes not aware or lack understanding of government reforms.

There is a need to incentivise teachers to stay in the public system instead of moving into the private system. Such incentives could include government subsidies for fresh graduates. Incentivising graduates who complete their teacher training and undertake further professional development is an important means of supporting effective teacher training. Encouraging trainees to teach in the public system by giving them the chance to work as assistant teachers could also be a means improving learning outcomes for English language students: being taught by a trainee English teacher is more effective than being taught by an accountant who has passed the basic aptitude test for English teaching.

Further problems include teachers not being qualified to teach learners in different age groups. A properly trained Grade 1 teacher will understand about language acquisition, play-based learning, pedagogy and other programmes and techniques; they will motivate younger learners through games and songs and focus on pronunciation before grammar. By contrast teenagers, who are at a stage where they know English is necessary, require different forms of motivation and a more grammatical approach, complemented with reading comprehension, games, songs and the use of new technologies in the classroom (TICs).

There is a gap between teachers who are being trained currently and those trained under an earlier system without ICT. This applies to general education and not just English language teaching. While teachers should be required to prepare for new generations that understand and learn in different ways, this is often not the case in practice.

Economic volatility

While there are few direct links between the economy and English language learning, economics have subtle yet significant effects in many areas related to language demand and acquisition. English is an undeniably important tool for certain industries and sectors that receive foreign direct investment (FDI) from countries such as China. Economic volatility can create a risky climate for investors and particular for multinational corporations, who are likely to have high English language requirements. Similarly, financial crises affect companies' budgetary decisions, such as whether to provide employees with English language training.

While tourism has become increasingly important, a focus on economic issues has meant that it is still not a priority area for the government. Changing financial conditions affect whether people can afford to travel to and from Argentina, and exchange rates affect the cost and affordability of books and other educational tools, particularly those that are imported. Hiring native English speakers or teaching staff from abroad can also become more costly during times of economic crisis. Unstable economics can affect funding in the education sector and, as such, can affect progress towards English language learning.

There is currently a gap in skills and learning outcomes between private and public sector students. While the private sector is often able to provide high-quality English language training, students in the public sector still tend to see English as 'just another subject' rather than something that could be useful in the future. Economic crises affect households' ability to pay for luxury goods and services, including private education, thereby affecting students' attitudes and learning outcomes in English. We found that 70 per cent of employers consider English to be essential for national prosperity; however, cost was a major barrier to English language learning for both the learners and non-learners in our survey, and there is a direct correlation between income and language learning.

University links

As there is no national English language learning policy, this invariably has an impact on the level of English proficiency students have by the time they enrol in higher education. While most English learners will study English in secondary school (80%), just 11 per cent studied the language because they needed it for university. Comparatively few people learned English during undergraduate study (27%) or postgraduate study (2%). There are no English language requirements for university entry and emphasis on English language learning varies between institutions, programmes and subject areas. Generally speaking, the level of English taught at public universities is basic and the focus is on developing the necessary reading skills for academic coursework rather than writing or speaking. Higher education entrants with a good level of English were usually educated in the private system.

Technology

English has a universal presence in technology. As digital access improves, technology is having an increasing impact on English teaching and learning. It is becoming a motivating and inspiring means of reaching out to a new generation and is enabling boundaries to extend beyond traditional and formal English language learning methods. Access to technology in Argentina is unequal and the country lags behind other industrialised countries in this respect. However, the Internet, mobile phones, tablets, interactive whiteboards and multimedia such as films and music have had a significant and wide-reaching impact on English language learning. In recent years, ICT has been incorporated in classrooms through schemes such as the Netbook Programme, which was designed to enhance English language learning and resulted in greater class participation and student engagement. Efforts have also been made to connect with people through technology by appealing to their needs and consumption patterns; for example, a person who reads a digital newspaper or e-book may be more likely to embrace digital language learning.

Digital classroom materials are being developed for teaching foreign languages. These should allow increased access to interactive learning and digital content. Social media have also increased access to information, such as news and films, from other parts of the world and their use is particularly prevalent among the young population. As such, new challenges have emerged as it becomes important for children and young people, as well as teachers, to know how to use digital and social media safely and effectively and to learn to differentiate between high- and low-quality content.

Employability

English is strongly correlated with employability and ‘added value’: according to local recruiters, around 70 per cent of jobs ask for English skills, even if these skills are not a fair or actual requirement of the job; for example, there are reports of English being a ‘requirement’ for supermarket shelf-stackers. We found that while 27 per cent of respondents learned English to improve their employment prospects, just eight per cent said it was necessary for their jobs; this indicates that Argentines may see English language training as a preparatory measure. Employers agree that English is largely essential for managerial staff, although they are less likely to see English as essential for non-managerial staff. Three quarters of the Argentinian companies surveyed reported using English externally. As high English proficiency is limited, employers are likely to source employees from a small group of highly skilled potential candidates, who invariably have similar backgrounds. This results in declining diversity and may negatively affect innovation; it also means that those without English skills may have limited career opportunities. When unemployment rises, English skills become even more important, and the employers in our survey associated English skills closely with organisational and national growth.

Politicisation of English

Although some believe that decisions regarding English language learning are driven by marketing, politics plays an important role. High demand for English from parents and the general population has prompted politicians to place English language learning on their political agendas. The mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri, was the driving force behind the decision to include English in the curriculum from Grade 1, resulting in major changes for the city’s education system: there are now state-run primary schools teaching intensive English, French, Portuguese and Chinese, and there are plans to teach mathematics and other subjects in English at secondary level. As with all political decisions, the motivations behind such decision-making are open to question and implementation and evaluation can be patchy. The politicisation of English also stems from international relations, and as the major lingua franca, English has become important for higher education qualifications in fields such as politics, international relations and related subjects.

Inclusive reforms

Buenos Aires has deep European roots and the marginalisation of indigenous communities is a contentious topic. The government is working towards more democratic and inclusive ideals, although these reforms have presented a challenge in terms of resource availability. Universal standards for secondary schools and teacher training colleges are being adopted across the country, resulting in a lowering of standards at some institutions. Inclusive reforms have meant that entrance exams are now banned in Buenos Aires province. These inclusive reforms have been designed to address the significant imbalances in learning conditions, teacher training and qualifications, English teaching hours and forms of English language learning across the country and between urban and rural areas: while key cities such as Buenos Aires, Cordoba and Rosario are home to a wide range of public, private and bilingual schools, which may also use English as the teaching medium for other subjects, rural students often receive deficient teaching and fewer contact hours.

Europeanisation and anti-imperialism

Traditionally, the English language has had imperialist connotations and was associated with the aristocratic immigrant class. As English has emerged as a lingua franca for non-English-speakers, this is largely no longer the case. However, anti-English sentiment may still exist among some populations, stemming from issues such as the Falklands War, or Guerra de las Malvinas, and relations with the US. Argentina is the most Caucasian country in South America; it has a higher percentage of European immigrants than neighbouring countries and Asian immigrants are also well established and well perceived. Intercultural law outlines the right to education in the mother tongue, and this reinforces the tradition of learning a second language.

Adoption of ‘multicultural’ English

Today, English is an international language and has become a lingua franca rather than just the language of English culture. As such, schools in Argentina are now called bilingual schools rather than English schools, and language learning has become concerned with factors in addition to the language itself: English as a means of transmitting other aspects related to language, such as global and national cultures, lifestyles and attitudes. This move could make English and all foreign languages more significant for students and allow them to consider their own languages and cultures in a new light and recognise and appreciate diversity and equality. The intention is that children should learn English from a multilingual perspective that enriches foreign language learning. In the last few years, there has been a substantial change in Argentina’s educational paradigm: there has been a shift towards an intercultural and multilingual approach that recognises linguistic diversity. This applies not only to the English language but also to Spanish and means that English is just another language, with the same importance as any other foreign or indigenous language.

Teaching a second language from this perspective is a challenge. Students and teachers must overcome ideas of imperialism or superiority attached to the English language. Teachers must also overcome preconceived ideas about what English language learning is and means and find new ways of inspiring students. English is no longer solely about securing a better job; it is about engaging with a new world vision and developing greater cultural understanding. Similarly, as the focus moves towards cultural understanding, less emphasis may be placed on becoming fully linguistically competent. This has been met with resistance in some areas, such as Santa Fe province, where local policies still favour a more traditional approach. The multilingual approach is also seen as problematic as it doesn’t acknowledge the preponderance of English in fields such as technology, tourism and migration. The importance of the Argentinian market for providers of ELT materials means that several publishers have created textbooks and associated resources for both the basic education (Educación General Básica, EGB) and poly-modal approaches.

Opportunities

English proficiency has been an essential part of the Argentinian approach to foreign language learning in schools. As such, the country has achieved relatively high levels of English proficiency. Barriers to uptake include the training and professional development of English teachers and the lack of a central English language learning policy. An awareness of where the gaps and opportunities lie may be advantageous for market observers and are summarised below:

- demand for English is high; in some areas this, and a lack of resources in the public education sector, has resulted in a shortage of qualified English language teachers
- as there is no dedicated English language policy and university resources and policies vary, students often neglect or lose English language skills during higher education
- ongoing financial uncertainty has meant that company budgets for employee development, including English language training, have suffered, and the number of corporate-sponsored language courses has fallen as a result
- the emphasis of English language learning is not just on the language itself but also on how the Argentinian identity can be conveyed in English
- national policy dictates that each region makes decisions to fit the local context; this has resulted in variations in English provision, resources and outcomes

Conclusion

As a result of historical and trading ties with the US and the UK and roots in European culture, English has been embedded in Argentina's elite and some sectors of the country's middle class for many years. The existence of a large English-speaking expatriate population since the 19th century has left a legacy of bilingual and English-medium schools as well as local English language media. Over time, English became associated with social status and prestige, although this is largely being replaced with the ideal of English as a lingua franca. Argentina also has a tradition of plurilingualism: teaching and learning many languages is part of the curriculum as well as wider society.

There is no national English language policy, and this has had an impact on the level of English proficiency that students reach. Education standards differ between and within provinces and there is a lack of quality assurance measures. The demand for English language skills is high - reflecting efforts to rebuild the domestic economy to previous heights - and this has resulted in a shortage of qualified teachers. As such, trainee teachers, who are often inexperienced, are allowed to teach under certain circumstances, and these teachers can enter the workforce without completing their training, perpetuating the cycle of low-quality teaching and weak learning outcomes. In some respects, the country's efforts to standardise and be inclusive have reduced the quality of education and English language teaching by lowering the standards for trainee teachers. These teachers are increasingly coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds and have weaker English and academic skills. To supplement low salaries, 'taxi teachers' work many jobs, traveling from school to school, reducing the focus and time spent on training. Overall, teachers feel undervalued and there are few incentives to enter or stay in the public education system; in vulnerable areas, teachers lack resources and experience large class sizes and their responsibilities are akin to those of social workers.

Unstable economic conditions have prevented the creation of an ideal English learning environment. While there is potential for growth in language-related areas such as tourism, the focus remains on more essential concerns such as employment and averting another economic crisis. Companies have less leeway to provide English training, and foreign travel has become more difficult. A weak currency has also increased the cost of imported books and education tools, and schools are unable to hire native English speakers from abroad due to limits on funds sent offshore. However, 75 per cent of Argentinian employers use English externally and most jobs require a high level of English proficiency. As a result, companies recruit from a limited pool of qualified candidates, thus reducing workplace diversity. The connection with employability means that parents increasingly want their children to learn English, and when joblessness rises, English becomes even more important. Most English language learning takes place during secondary school, and as universities do not have English language entry requirements, English skills may be neglected and decline during higher education.

The government is actively working towards more democratic, inclusive ideals in an attempt to redress the country's history of marginalising indigenous communities. This new approach takes a multilingual view of identity through language and recognises linguistic diversity, not only in the English language but also in Spanish. The challenge now is in approaching English not just as a communication tool but also as a means of transmitting and understanding aspects of different cultures. As such, Argentina has incorporated English language learning as part of a new, multicultural world vision.