



20 LEARNERS 24 REPORT



LEADING THE DISCUSSION



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Business English Learners Report 2023

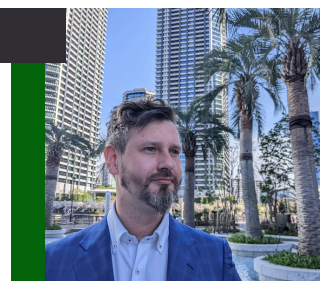
This annual report is intended to provide a snapshot of the current global conditions which are relevant to adult learners of English. We will focus on working professionals who are actively engaged in global business operations.

In this report, we will focus on three major factors: we'll ask ourselves not only what difficulties these occurrences can present for learners, but also how students can potentially benefit from these shifts. Ultimately, we hope to lead the discussion on how individual educators and education services can deliver greater value to their student base.

About the Author

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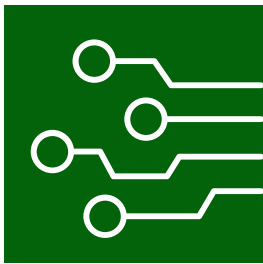
ABOUT THIS REPORT

THEMES



Corporate Culture

We'll discuss how the recent shifts in corporate culture are affecting learners' needs.



Technology

We'll look at how emerging technologies are changing how we learn.



Economy

We will focus on how economic instability plays a part in learners' lives.

CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS:

For each topic we will discuss potential difficulties for how students communicate at work or drawbacks in the learning process.

THE STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITY:

We will also consider what possible gains students can make from the current situation and how to best invest their time.

HOW EDUCATORS CAN WIN BIG:

based on the students' perspective, we'll start the conversation about how education providers, material developers and instructors can help.



OVERVIEW

00

Learning in a Decade of Instability

2021 introduced us to life in the 'permacrisis'. Technological leaps have collided with economic instability as shifts in corporate culture occur across all sectors.

Post-COVID market optimism has largely been replaced with a sense of uncertainty. The unprecedented is normal and agility compulsory. In short, it's no understatement that learners in 2024 are living in interesting times.

The last few years have seen an oversaturation of resources for improving communication and language. These include, but are restricted to, the large numbers of apps, LMS-based websites, and online video content. The age of sending in a native-instructor with a generic business textbook may well have come to an end.

However, the demand for proper guidance among the student base is ever strong. Direct coaching through partnerships appears to be one of the more fruitful options. And now, more than ever, is an opportunity for education providers to increase the value they present.

A great race to prove value in the corporate language education market has begun and we can afford optimism about the results.

“

now, more than ever, is an **opportunity** for education providers **to increase the value** they present

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WORK CULTURE

01



Everywhere, all at once

As we enter a post-pandemic world, international collaborations become increasingly commonplace. Video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams have solidified themselves as essential business communication tools. With that, the few reasons to rely only on domestic talent have all but dissipated. Senior managers now have the ability to create 'all-star teams' powered by advanced project-management systems for high-priority projects.

Furthermore, many employees now divide their hours between remote work and a physical office. They are expected to split their communications between face-to-face contact, email, Slack project, management solutions, and mobile apps such as Line and Whatsapp, to name but a few.



CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS:

It's no longer enough for domestic talent to merely be exceptional in their field. There is now an immense pressure to be collaborating and sharing on the world stage. Learners who are unable to participate at this level will lose out regardless of their vocational ability. Additional time is required by many working professionals to invest in their communication skill set. Additionally, deciding what to communicate, how to communicate it and which platform to communicate it on presents a challenge in itself. This compounds with employees being much more likely feel the pressure of being stretched over multiple teams on simultaneous projects.


THE STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITY:

This new demand for 'world-capable communicators is driving career opportunity acceleration for working professionals able to meet this new criteria. Learners who invest their time wisely into communication self-development have a chance for rapid career development. Areas with a particularly useful focus are language skills relating to project management and ensuring that their interpersonal skills translate adeptly into their global business operations.



a chance for rapid **career development**



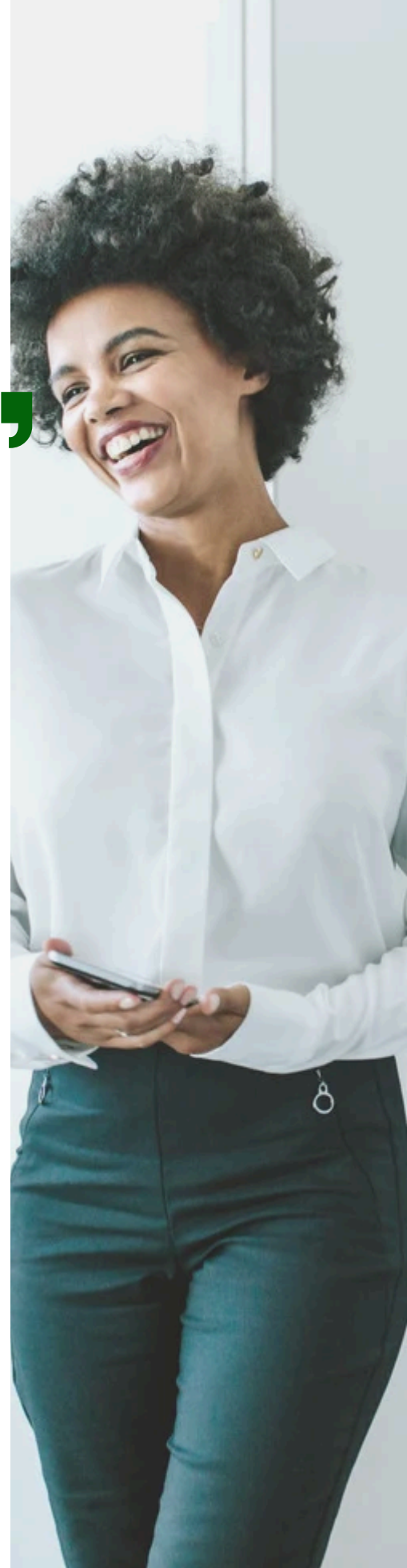


open dialogue with students about
their current priorities
presents **the highest value** ”

HOW EDUCATORS CAN WIN BIG:

Education services which can most benefit from this are ones which hire instructors capable of aligning their lesson plans directly with their student's current needs. Educators who can open dialogue with students about their current priorities are the ones who can present the highest value. Educators need to effectively interpret student's requests from "I need to improve my vocabulary" into "I want to sound more like an industry professional in meetings. Alignment to the learners real life conditions is challenging but important. For example, perhaps a student needs to jump into an international video meeting to make a quick presentation. Instead of providing a general guide to long-form presentations, instructors and coaches may need to ask, "What are the main points you need to make?" and collaborate with the student from that standpoint.

Creating an environment where students can prepare for real-life challenges in a psychologically safe environment lends enormous value to the educational experience. This flavor of 'active support' needs to be integrated with training best practices across the board and instructors need to be actively supported internally to develop that skill set.



TECHNOLOGY

02

The State of the Art

The final months of 2021 saw the Pandora's box opening: now, free and affordable large -language model AIs, are rapidly becoming common place including transformer-based neural network models such as ChatGPT and DeepL. These new programs are able to translate even highly idiomatic and nuanced segments of language.

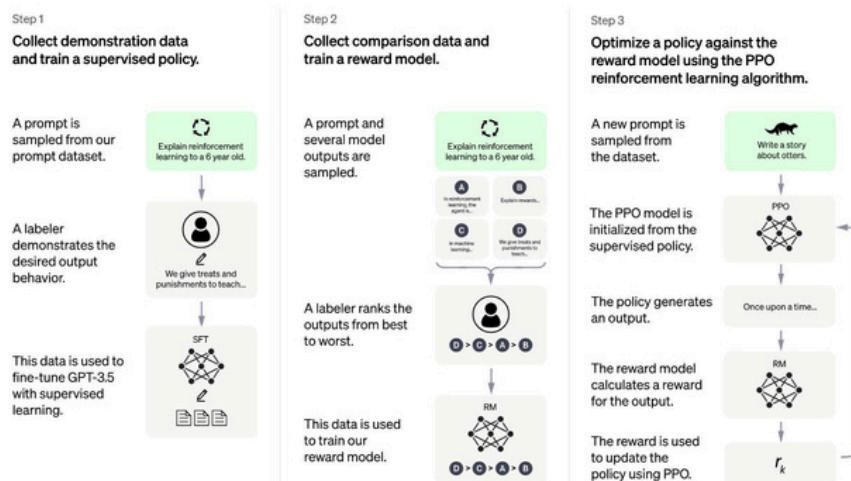


Image courtesy of openai.com



CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS:

The primary challenge they face is constructing a balance between utilization and reliance. As with all technology, over-reliance can breed skill weaknesses. Learners who use these emerging platforms as a substitute for active understanding will quickly find themselves out of depth in real-world situations. ChatGPT, for example, can produce pitch-perfect emails but will do nothing to empower a learner's live presentation to global decision makers.

THE STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITY:

Learners have been given a powerful tool to augment their existing understanding. Interlanguage issues—the gap of understanding between one's first and additional languages, can now be alleviated through careful self study of AI-generated content. For example, a proactive learner can compare their own content against that of an AI, picking up their shortcomings and expanding their active understanding. This is only one of the countless ways natural language processing can be utilized.

Take for example a simple comparison between a word's dictionary definition against AI-generated example sentences. The faithful bilingual dictionary of the 20th century will provide meaning and possible first-language synonyms. Whereas an AI will produce usage examples produced complete with context and high-frequency word combinations. This represents an enormous leap in how language can be presented, acquired and understood outside of a lesson environment.

“an enormous leap in how language can be presented, acquired, and understood outside of a lesson environment”

do away with generic set course materials in favor of organic, student-led sessions

HOW EDUCATORS CAN WIN BIG:

Language Education vendors will fall into two camps: Alarmists who see them as an existential threat, and those who will successfully adopt them into existing training practices

The former will ultimately lose out due to underestimating the value of their service. Adult communication education is more than capable of reaching far beyond merely assisting language acquisition. No matter how sophisticated AI and machine learning becomes, they will never be able to instil confidence and promote a leadership mindset in learners.

Individual educators will have to be creative about how they introduce and integrate these technologies to their sessions. If they can guide students on how to incorporate this technology into their study routine, they'll be arming the students with a powerful tool which has a catalytic effect on their learning journey.

Additionally, AI platforms can greatly assist instructors, teachers, and lecturers in lesson preparation and quickly produce situation-specific content tailored to their learners' needs. With that in mind, it is viable now more than ever to do away with generic set course materials in favor of organic, student-led sessions with job-specific content created with assistance from AI.



ECONOMY

03

Doing More with Less

Global companies with operations in East Asia are directly affected by the Chinese government's stance of prioritizing political control over economic expansion as per the zero-COVID policies. On the other side of the map, firms with their operations rooted within the EU have to deal with increasing energy prices with energy-intensive industries such as the manufacturing sector, faring the worst. Stricter financial conditions are cascading down on the private sector with some companies experiencing a near-perpetual hiring freeze, shortening and simplification of supply chains, and a near across-the-board drop in demand.

In addition, companies have to navigate the near-constant political risk of lightning-strike policy changes by governments, world banks and large-scale financial institutions alike.



CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS:

Key members of staff who are retired or made redundant may not be replaced. As headcounts suffer, so does communication flow. Emails are sent into the void, escalations stay on desks, and customer requests are left answered.

Furthermore jobs, especially those related to finance, HR, and manufacturing, will have to contend with compliance to ever-changing regulations adding more weight to heavy workloads in understaffed teams.

THE STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITY:

In a business landscape with very little options on the menu, the term 'individual leadership' best encapsulates the mindset needed to weather the storm. Proactive communication may well be the most viable solution to a number of problems being faced. On a simple level, the words "I've already contacted the Singapore team- I've attached their assessment below" will be well-received and greatly appreciated in a resource-lacking environment.

However, the benefits of leadership communication also have a more direct impact on business.

For example, key account executives who are able to act independently to support priority escalations at global level will free up much needed managerial resources. If accountancy teams, faced with regulation changes, are able to reach out to their counterparts in overseas market units, they will be significantly more able to obtain and share feasible solutions quickly. Project managers can earn themselves greater value delivery if they can involve specialists outside of their domestic talent pool. The list goes on.



Proactive communication may well be **the most viable solution** to a number of problems being faced.



“ **Language skills** in concert with **communication strategy** present the **greatest value.** ”

HOW EDUCATORS CAN WIN BIG:

From a service perspective, training organizations have a real opportunity to prove themselves as effective partners during times of distress. To do so they need to be able to show net value results which have a positive impact on operations. To demonstrate a clear ROI from their training, careful thought needs to be given about how assessment and evaluations are carried out; how learner progress can be quantified. Assessments need to move beyond TOEIC scoring into how the training has had a positive impact on their clients' KPIs/KVIs. They can increase their value to customers by taking a snapshot of the learners' improvement as a before/after image of ability and explain clear roadmaps moving forward.

As resources become tighter, the need for effective strategy increases. With that in mind, at a course-design level, methodology and syllabuses which focus on language skills in concert with communication strategy present the greatest value. Additionally, educators need to be able to walk into a room with an active awareness of their customer's current pain points, at both an organizational and personal level and have prepared strategies for how to address these issues.

Examples of strategic communication elements may include framing requests to yield the best results, highlighting required actions, right through to motivating team members during times of difficulty.

Put simply, instructors who will engage with the learners about their difficulties, understand what is needed and present actionable communication strategies will prove to be an invaluable ally in their learners' lives.





THANK YOU

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