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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

A Target Situation Analysis of the Requirements of English Language Competence for Arabic Airlines Ground Staff

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| **ABSTRACT**

The study explores the English Language needs of Arabic Airline ground staff in specialized contexts, focusing mainly on routine communication with passengers. The study conducted a Target Situation Linguistics Analysis to investigate the staff's communicative requirements, competence, and weaknesses. Mixed-methods research was used to conduct the data collection and analysis procedures. The data analysis procedure followed two phases of data collection. First, the data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire based on the English language: 1) speaking, listening, reading, and writing, 2) communication skills, such as inquiry, persuasion, active listening, and intelligibility, and 3) English vocabulary for specific purposes. Second, the English language skills of the participants were evaluated by the British Council English Score's Core Skills and Speaking tests. The findings revealed that a significant number of the participants possessed inadequate or sub-par proficiency levels, making it consistent with the findings of other research in different contexts. For example, Ling and Wimolkasem (2022) reached similar results in China and Thailand. Moreover, the findings underscore the need for better-tailored teaching programs and modules to account for the diversity within learners, in this case, the ground aviation staff. It also adds valuable insights for curriculum developers and teachers in different professional contexts. The study found there is a critical need to introduce tailored programs for aviation staff that would incorporate effective adult communication strategies, enabling them to communicate effectively in linguistically diverse environments.

| **KEYWORDS**

Target situation, linguistic analysis, English language needs, ground staff, adult, communication, teacher education.

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1. Introduction

English enjoys the status of an international language, second language, foreign language, and lingua franca around the globe. It is an official second language in many previously colonized countries. Arab states use English as a second language for Arabs and Arabic as the second language for non-Arabs in their education systems. The Arab states are multilingual societies where people from different nationalities reside to gain professional and educational benefits. Thus, the Arab states have diverse curricula in their education systems. They have a standard national curriculum, which requires all courses to be taught in Arabic. English is used as a second language, but only for technical and scientific courses. This is a drawback in Arab states because they are ignoring the communicative aspect of English as a global language within their country. English for Academic Purposes (AEP) deeply affects the occupational use of English in different professions, such as the aviation industry. The UAE airlines need staff who are efficient and fluent in English because of the language's diversity and its cultural acceptance. Also, multilingualism enhances the need to speak a global language such as English in the UAE—the aviation programs at the universities require English for technical and high-level courses.

The problem of studying the language of the employees of the Airline industry comes under the broadly defined field of ESP (English for specific purposes), which was introduced as an acronyms. It falls under a sub-branch of ESP called EOP (English for occupational purposes) and further into the EPP (English for professional purposes). Other occupations included in these

branches of ESP are Nursing, Medicine, STEM, Business, and Tourism (Anthony, 2018). Of course, the professional needs of language and communication are further based on English for Academic Purposes. (Anthony, 2018)

The airline industry is a widespread business that offers air travel or transport services to paid customers and business partners. The airlines facilitate human travel and cargo services to bring people and products to different countries around the globe. They also offer a variety of registered services to customers that are a vital element of the broader travel industry. These customers are provided seats on demand in a flight. Booking or buying tickets is conducted online and through personal visits to the relevant airline offices. Customers travel around the globe with the services of the airline industry.

Every country has its own national, international, and regional airline companies. Based in Dubai, Emirates Airlines is the most popular airline in the UAE. Other national and regional airlines also operate in the UAE. Airline ground staff of all airlines perform essential duties such as airport police, security, airline ticket agents, reservation service agents, passenger service agents, baggage handlers, administration, airport planners, and more. They provide services ranging from supplying the aircraft with food and drink, cleaning aircraft after flights, helping disabled passengers and children, and providing information to the passengers. All these job responsibilities require English language proficiency and communication skills while interacting and negotiating with people of different ages, cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities. The ground staff cannot perform these professional duties effectively without excellent language and communication skills.

This research focused on the English language needs of the Arabic airline ground staff for adequately performing their professional duties. The research was conducted through an in-depth analysis by amalgamating the two approaches of ESP, the learner-centered approach and the adult learner theory (andragogy) (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). As for the latter, Kim (2008) presented that the adults' prime social role is validated by their occupational qualifications and communication with people of different ages functioning in the same or other professional circumstances. Needs analysis was the next step in the research. The needs analysis has at least four strategies for ESP needs: exploring, investigating, examining, and analyzing the current needs to design a justified curriculum in the teaching and learning context (Brown, 2016). For the current research, the researcher chose the target situation linguistic analyses that focused on the linguistic features the staff needed to be aware of in ESP and EOP. These target situation linguistic analyses designated and examined the explicit linguistic features of the ESP. The linguistic features of interest were vocabulary, collocation, grammar, pronunciation, connected speech, formality, discourse markers, pragmatics (meaning in context), and genres or other language features (Brown, 2016). The key purpose of this research was to investigate the required English competence and efficiency for the Arabic airline ground staff to perform their occupational duties. The study focused on a questionnaire to explore the necessities, lacks, and desires of the learners to have a command of the English language and communication skills to interact with people of different ages at the airports while performing their professional and official tasks. Furthermore, the data-gathering process included two tests from the 'British Council English Score': English core skills and speaking. These tests were conducted individually on mobile phones. Participants shared their results by submitting a Google online form. Additionally, when the participants tested their English language skills, they developed an eagerness to learn more. The level of integrated motivation of the learners and attitude towards English language learning for EOP is an important gap to fill.

In addition to studying the needs and problems of the aviation ground staff of the Arabic airlines, this research also adds to the field of English language teaching and learning. Since the research focused on different problems the staff faced while performing their duties, it was equally important to suggest how to tailor more sophisticated teaching modules to reduce this gap. Not only did the research delve into the specific needs of the airline staff, it also pinpointed the crucial role of teaching and providing resources for learning. In this way, it attempted to contribute to English teaching and learning.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: The literature review is presented in section 2, the research methodology is described in section 3, and the results and discussion are presented in section 4. Section 5 explains the conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Phithakphongphan (2016) studied the effects of online instructions on airline ground staff to measure the attitude toward English language learning for communication purposes. Phithakphongphan (2016) focused his analysis on functional English by using all four language skills needed by the Phuket International Airport staff. The data were collected from thirty selected ground staff respondents who completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire gauged the diverse levels of the need for English skills. After completing the questionnaires, the researcher interviewed the staff to investigate their attitudes towards learning English. The results from the quantitative analysis showed that the respondents needed speaking and listening skills on the 'extremely' level and reading and writing on the 'mostly' level. The interview results showed that the ground staff felt they must learn English for their future endeavors and professional purposes.

Cahyani and Drajati (2017) conducted a study in Indonesia on the English language skills of airline and airport service employees who were proficient in speaking English and used it to establish effective communication. The purpose of the study was to instruct the stakeholders on how to improve the airport and flight operations by managing the passengers with effective English and supporting the smooth flow of their duties at the airport. The course design was relevant to ESP for managing different situations, and a needs analysis was conducted to assess their skills and find ways to improve their deficiencies. This small-scale

study demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of the staff by collecting the data through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires to gauge the needs and problems the current working staff faced when performing oral communication tasks during social engagements. The findings showed that the ESP course design needed improvements to tackle the needs and problems of the experienced staff. Moreover, the results of this study outline the crucial role of teacher education in enhancing the capabilities of English language instructors to address the specific needs of the aviation sector effectively.

Barkhordari and Chalak (2017) emphasized the importance of English language skills in aviation employees, claiming that these employees take their language needs for granted.

The goal of this study was to discover how much English the employees of Iran Air services used at the Isfahan Airport, what their English language needs were to do their jobs, and how they felt about English language courses and programs. The data were collected through a questionnaire containing twenty-four items from employees working in three different sections of the Isfahan Airport, such as ramp control, customer services, and baggage services. The researcher also observed real-life situations at the airport and interviewed all three section heads. The findings revealed that the English language skills used in jobs and training courses increasingly failed to satisfy the needs of the employees. The employees of all three sections felt speaking was the most important skill, while the baggage services employees considered reading and writing essential. Again, the findings showed that professional training programs must improve ESP courses.

Another study was conducted by Hidayat (2018) that emphasized the importance of needs analysis for institutions to develop an English-language curriculum to explore the competence of airline staff. Needs analysis helps institutions discover the needs of employees, directing them to design and expand the English curriculum to enhance the quality of English language and communication education. The goal of this study was to examine what English learning needs the students in an international tourism college's airline staff program had and to see how well the English curriculum met those student needs. The methodology of this study was mixed, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data were collected through the purposive sample of seventy- one students in the airline staff program, the teacher, and the college manager. The instruments were closed-ended questionnaires and interviews. The data analysis and interpretation were based on data reduction, presentation, and verification by using qualitative and quantitative research methods. The first set of findings was based on English-language learning through four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, speaking skills and communication were the top priorities. The second set was based on documentation of course design and curriculum, which were found to be appropriate and meet the needs of the students. The teaching materials were found to be lacking, and they needed upgrading to develop communication and speaking skills. The study helped the institutions design appropriate curricula by analyzing the students' needs.

Cahyani et al. (2018) conducted another study on the teaching and learning of airline staff and candidates in an Indonesian training center. They looked into the needs, weaknesses, and strengths of the teachers and students among airline staff candidates. The document studies (teaching materials), class activities, final scoring, and interviews with students and teachers were used as data collection tools to gather data for further analysis. The collected data were bundled to complete the data procedures after observing materials and classroom activities for data analysis. The teaching materials were based on job interview skills and English for professional purposes relevant to airlines and aviation, ticket booking, and baggage handling in the form of dialogues and handouts. The airline staff candidates found the terminology in the books to be difficult since they had a limited vocabulary. The findings showed that the students who lacked a good vocabulary, confidence, and language proficiency in a professional environment struggled. The final scores of all three classes of interview, professional English and basic English indicated that the students needed English language skills for interviews and the use of language in normal communication. The findings also showed that the English-language teachers' lack of knowledge of the airline industry created hindrances in setting objectives and planning lessons for students. The researcher emphasized the need for English language usage within the community of English-speaking teachers in this field.

Rico et al. (2019) created a project based on the need for new technical and professional skills required by online distance learning courses for occupational purposes. Information Communication Technology (ICT) distance learning approaches made it easy to develop new skills that helped the professionals gauge their competence. The purpose of this research was to design, evaluate, and disseminate online multimedia English for occupational purposes and to identify linguistic proficiency in professional conditions. The research had a twofold aim: first, to check the transfer rate and factors that made this EOP course successful, and second, to investigate the expectations, outcomes, and failures of these specific courses. The data were collected from twelve national, non- formal teaching businesses which delivered such courses. The data collection was conducted by designing questionnaires and interviews. The findings showed satisfaction with the courses. However, they also showed that the linguistic policies were lacking along with subsequent influence on professional accomplishments.

Kaya (2021) conducted a similar study on a cabin services program to design a vocational English language course to improve employees' English language competency. The study used the recent triangulation method where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed separately but simultaneously where both approaches were uncontrolled. The sample population was divided into two groups, the first of which included 352 enrolled students in four universities vocational schools of aviation. The research focused on robust teacher education programs where educators were equipped with the

necessary skills to help students with the specialized courses. The data for this study was collected using the cluster sampling technique. The second group consisted of instructors from four universities; four in-service flight attendants also contributed through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data were collected through content analysis, and the quantitative data were obtained by analyzing the questionnaires' statistically descriptive procedures, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation. The results and discussion discovered that the students must improve their speaking and listening skills to be successful in their future professional endeavors. The findings also suggested developing a practitioner's guide to expand the vocational English language curriculum by using an effective model of curriculum development.

Moreover, Singh et al. (2021) researched the spoken and written communication needs of aviation trainees to investigate the language proficiency and communication skills required for the job. The purpose was also to help the stakeholders develop an effective and communicative course to remedy poor language proficiency and lack of professional skills. The needs analysis method was chosen to explore the essential communication skills of aviation professionals. There were two primary purposes of the study according to the demands of stakeholders relevant to communication requisites. The first purpose of the study was to examine English as the medium of communication for the Air Vice Marshal (AVM) staff to perform their duties with local and international companies In Malaysia. Second, the researcher also wanted to investigate the spoken and written communication activities the AVM personnel usually used during duty hours in the aviation industry. The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews as ESP, and the target analysis approach was exploited. Needs analysis is the most suitable option for designing a course for ESP. The questionnaire was designed to investigate the speaking and writing frequencies of the trainees and several aviation organizations to determine the speaking and writing activities during real communication at the airport. Moreover, the findings emphasized the need for spoken and written English to complete deals, negotiate with customers and clients at the airport, and write proposals, minutes of meetings, memos, and emails.

Gaoqiang (2021) researched the issues and problems faced by employees of Emirates Airlines using EOP. The paper discussed the English language problems of the airline staff and what they faced while performing their professional duties and responsibilities. This paper also analyzed the need to improve their language and communication skills. The methodology was quantitative and depended on surveying male and female participants of Emirates Airlines at the Malaysian branch and headquarters. Most of these participants are seniors with experience. They agreed upon the need for the proficient use of English for aviation. The data were collected through Google Docs and stored and analyzed in Excel along with pie charts. The percentage of questionnaire responses relevant to communication problems was presented on pie charts. The results and discussion explained that Malaysian society is a multicultural society with Malay, Chinese, Indian, and native cultures. This diversity creates problems for English speakers because of differences in the grammatical structures of languages. In addition, there are ten Malay dialects: Bahasa Malaysia, Kelantanese, Terengganuan, Kedahan, Sarawakian, Bajau, Negeri Sembilan Malay, Banjar, Bruneian and Indonesian. English and Malay are from different families of languages. Vocabulary problems arise because of this language diversity. This causes miscommunication because English is used as a second language in Malaysia. EOP is considered essential for the aviation industry to avoid communication problems.

Chayut Teerapraphal (2023) studied the English language training needs of passenger service agents in the Thai aviation industry. The research employed quantitative methodology and studied the data collected from 73 Thai passenger service agents. The study's findings could potentially improve the quality of customer service and communication with the passengers by the staff.

Singh, Cheong, and Rahman (2021) investigated the English proficiency of aviation management personnel (AVM) in Malaysia. The study was conducted through a needs analysis to understand the requirement of English language proficiency by the aviation staff of local and international companies. The findings of the study were twofold. First, it recognized the need for English to be the primary vehicle of communication among the personnel and passengers. Second, it emphasized the need for strong English language foundations for those entering the workforce. The study also found that personnel engaged in multiple written and spoken communication activities. The authors recommended developing a special course tackling the requirements of the AVM staff.

Mahmood, Saad, and Nur (2023) investigated the experience of six aircraft maintenance students from different aircraft schools, who revealed that their experiences learning English brought positivity to their work. It brought them more opportunities, positive feelings, and success. They also pointed out challenges to learning English and how they contributed to the anxiety and career problems of the students. The researchers said one of the main obstacles to learning English was the lack of adequate resources like textbooks and teaching resources. Also, despite the study's limited sample size, multiple case studies lent credibility to the study's findings.

The literature discussed above represents similarities and differences in the limitations regarding English language skills, methodologies, and data collection and analysis. All the studies used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method studies. Some used needs analysis to improve the weak areas of the staff's English language and communication skills and emphasized improving the curriculum for occupational, vocational, or professional purposes. There was an element of teaching and learning English language skills in classroom activities, interview skills, and professional vocabulary for the experienced staff to improve the communication skills used during the professional duties. Few studies discussed language constraints because of prevalent

multilingualism, which causes a considerable hindrance in learning a second or foreign language because of different linguistic structures. All the studies specifically researched two English language skills instead of four. Singh et al. (2021) conducted research on communication skills (spoken and written) by delimiting the area of research. Kaya (2021) conducted research on listening and speaking skills along with curriculum improvement by developing an effective model. The current research focused on linguistics features by implementing a target situation linguistic analysis where a wide range of language skills were assessed by adding the questionnaire of constructs (Appendix A) and also arranging an English language skills test by inculcating a well-known application of the British Council English Score where participants discover and improve their English language skills by practicing the test on the application. The application covers the Core Skills Test and Speaking Test, which include multiple language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, and speaking. This test allows adult learners to explore and improve their weaknesses and work on their language needs, necessities and wants. According to the literature mentioned above, no study examined the linguistic features of English language skills improvement for EOP, ESP, and EVP. The current study focused on linguistics features such as meaning, vocabulary context for professional purposes, discourse markers, grammar and pronunciation collocation, and the four skills that create a significant difference in establishing effective communication during professional careers.

3. Methodology

This section provides a comprehensive survey of the research methodology and procedures used to conduct this research. Specifically, it focuses on the research design, sampling technique, instrument construction, data collection method, and data analysis. This study used a quantitative research approach and a survey research design as the data collection methodology to answer the Research Questions (RQs). The following research questions and hypotheses are addressed using various research methods.
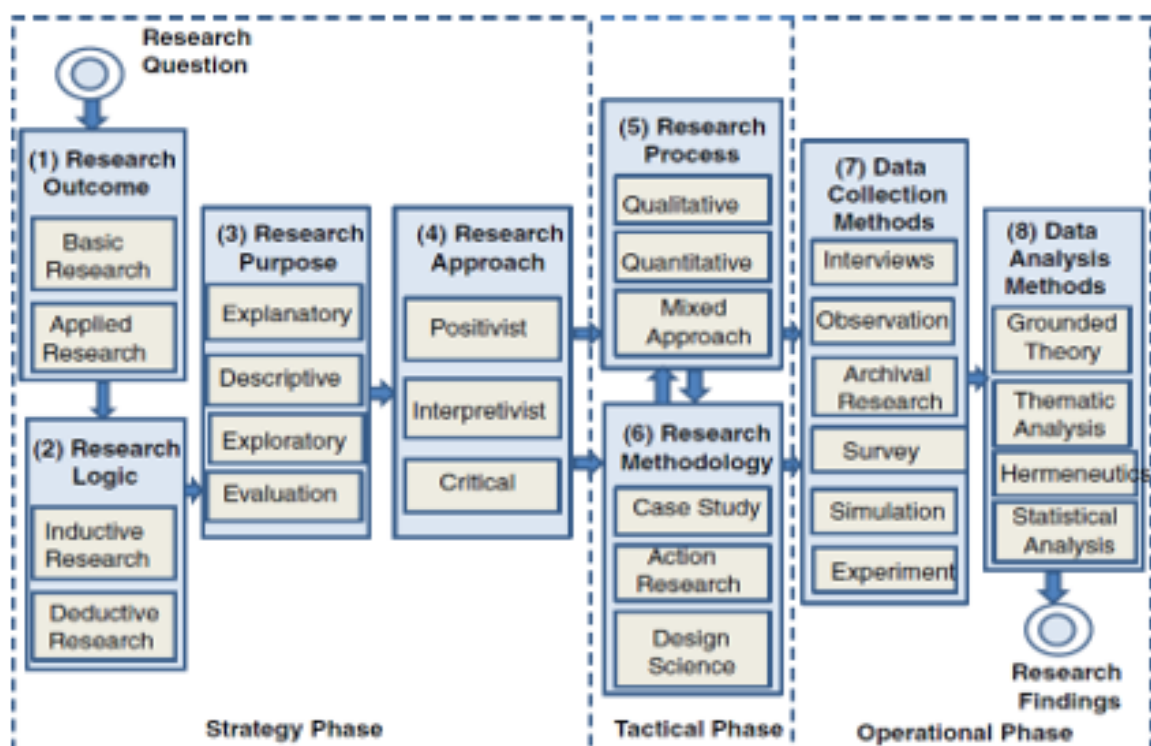
RQ 1. Do Arabic airline ground staff use English language skills efficiently when performing their duties?

RQ 2. Do the Arabic airline ground staff lack sufficient English knowledge while interacting with people at the airport?

Hypothesis: A substantial portion of Arabic airline ground staff experience problems in effectively communicating in English, which can be attributed to their insufficient knowledge of the English language.
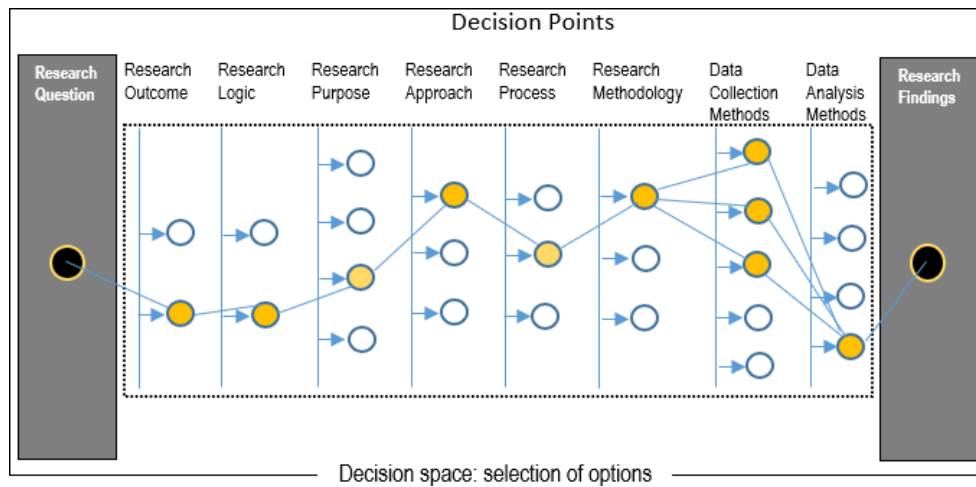
The guidelines suggested by Wohlin and Aurum (2015) were used to develop the research strategy. The research structure, as depicted in Figure 1, has three phases: strategy, tactical, and operational, with eight decision points. Furthermore, each decision point is executed using a variety of approaches.

Figure 1. Structure of the Research (Wohlin and Aurum, 2015)

As a result, the decision-making process of the research design is mapped with the research structure illustrated in Figure 2 using Wohlin and Aurum's guidelines (Wohlin and Aurum, 2015).

Figure 2. Decision-Making Process of the Research

This research aimed to investigate the Arabic airline ground staff's English language needs for occupational purposes. The study focused on the questionnaires based on the needs analysis to explore the necessities, lacks, and desires of the learners to develop the English language and communication skills necessary to interact with people of different ages at the airports while performing their professional and official tasks. Therefore, for the research outcome and logic, this research used applied research and a deductive top- down technique to work from general to specific. This approach starts with a theory, develops hypotheses based on that theory, and gathers and analyses data to evaluate the hypotheses. This research began with a comprehensive literature review to identify the problem. Research questions and hypotheses were developed for the target situation, the linguistic analysis of English language needs for Arabic airline ground employees. The research was evaluated after data collection and analysis. The positivist research approach is used when the process is repeatable since it requires an objective approach and accurate results. The research process decision point was based on a quantitative method because this study focused on the linguistic analysis of English language needs for Arabic airline ground employees, which necessitated survey design, quantitative analysis, and statistical techniques to analyze the data. The exploratory research design methodology allowed multiple analyses and perspectives. As a result, this study used an exploratory research approach by developing a survey questionnaire in two phases for collecting data for this investigation, as it facilitated the analysis of a phenomenon in its natural setting.

First, a questionnaire was developed to collect demographic information from respondents and information pertaining to the goal of this research. The questionnaire was designed to reach a specific group of airline ground staff to better understand their English needs. The online questionnaire Survey Monkey software tool was used to distribute the questionnaire to a target population. The questionnaire included 25 questions, divided into four sections consisting of pertinent closed-ended questions to indicate the study's research goal. The survey was conducted from May 10 to May 30, 2022. The constructs of this research questionnaire are prearranged in Appendix A. The questionnaire's constructs were divided into four key modules: 1) demographic information about the respondents, 2) listening, 3) speaking, and 4) reading. The second phase of data gathering consisted of an application of the British Council English Score system. The participants attempted the English language skills test on this application by downloading the app (English Score) to their mobile devices. After downloading the application, they used the first test to explore their weaknesses and needs. Then, they unlocked the second test for speaking. The participants attempted two tests based on the 'Core Skills Test' (grammar and vocabulary, reading, listening) and the 'Speaking Test' (pronunciation, fluency, and communication) within an hour or so. A third test, the 'Beta Writing Test,' was available in the application, but because of time constraints, it was not used for the convenience and facilitation of the participants. After attempting these two English language skills tests, the participants shared their results on a provided Google form by adding all the categories mentioned above for individual skills in each test and submitted it to the researcher. This data was analyzed through different measures chosen by the researcher and discussed as follows:

The measures were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' There were three steps to this research: 1) construction of a questionnaire, 2) data collection, and 3) data analysis. A questionnaire was established in the first phase of data collection. In the second phase, an online distribution mode via an online questionnaire link, Facebook post, WhatsApp, and emails were used, ensuring that it was sent to the appropriate target audience. According to the most recent figures (Statista 2021), Facebook and WhatsApp have 2.74 billion and 2 billion million active users, respectively, illustrating the global popularity and widespread use of these social media communication channels. Data was collected using the Survey Monkey SPSS file format. In the third phase, the collected data was statistically evaluated after importing the .csv file to compile the results using the IBM SPSS statistical analysis tool.

The data for this study was collected using a non-probability purposive sampling method aimed to provide more accurate results than random sampling, which considers that a questionnaire reveals information about group activities or situations. The researcher contacted respondents in their networks, who then reached out to others. In addition, the researcher recruited participants through a Facebook post and WhatsApp group. The participants were also invited to participate in the survey via email. Gender, educational level, and age parameters were among the selection criteria. The final sample included a total of 73 participants. Section 4 provides the demographic characteristics of the participants. For the second phase of the data collection procedure, the same participants downloaded the application (English Score)for the British Council English Score to attempt the English language skills test. They shared the results of the Core Skills and Speaking Skills tests with the researcher via a Google Doc that listed the basic skills of communication. The participants were instructed to share their results with the researchers to benefit from the test and improve themselves in future professional endeavors. The researchers also designed and implemented an effective English language course curriculum to aid them in improving their language proficiency to establish excellent communication at the airports as Arabic airline ground staff.

The results of this research were statistically analyzed using the normality test, one sample t-test, an independent sample t-test, ANOVA, Pearson Correlation, and Cronbach's alpha (α) to evaluate and validate the hypothesis. The sample responses received from the respondents were statistically analyzed by standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for data normality using IBM SPSS version 24. To further comprehend and evaluate the conceptual model and determine whether the questionnaire constructs were reliable measures, the author analyzed the reliability and validity of each survey construct. The reliability of a total of 0.8 constructs was determined using a Cronbach's alpha (α) analysis. The stated hypothesis was developed to answer the research questions, and the data was statistically evaluated and validated using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro- Wilk tests, which are non-parametric tests. In Section 4, the statistical analysis and findings are discussed in detail.

Sample

The study sample consisted of 73 participants. All participants were males, and 90.4% were between 21 and 30 years of age. 56.2% had a high school degree, 42.5% had a bachelor's degree, and one participant reported having a master's degree. Fifty-four participants, or 74%, were airline agents or customer service representatives.

Sixty-seven participants completed the English language test. However, as there were two separate applications and identification data were not collected, the respondents' answers could not be matched between the two datasets.

Some participants submitted the test multiple times. These duplicate entries were deleted before the analysis, leaving only unique entries.

Derived variables

From the English Language Needs Questionnaire, four scores were derived corresponding to the four categories of English language needs:

- Language Skills (Category A) – calculated by averaging the first five items of the questionnaire. Items 2 and 4 were reverse-scored.
- Communication Skill or Communicative Competence (Category B) – calculated by averaging items 6–11. Items 9 and 10 were reverse-scored.
- English for Specific Purposes or English for Vocational Purposes (Category C) – calculated by averaging items 12–16. Items 13, 14, and 16 were reverse-scored.
- Linguistics Features (Category D) – calculated by averaging items 17–25. Items 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25 were reverse-scored.

The values of these variables were coded so that higher scores indicated greater language needs, i.e., lower English language skills and abilities.

In the scope of the psychometric evaluation of the questionnaire, Horn's parallel analysis indicated that four variables do not adequately describe the latent structure of questionnaire answers. The results of this procedure suggested that two factors underpinned the responses to the questionnaire. In line with this, two new variables were derived from the questionnaire items. These were named:

- Communication problems and
- English skills

Their structure, as well as the results the factor analysis was based on, is presented in the results and discussion section. Values of these variables were coded so that higher scores on communication problems indicate lower levels of problems and higher scores on English skills indicate lower skill levels. Because these were scored in opposite directions, in the sense that high skills were indicated by low scores on one variable and high scores on the other, another reverse-coded communication-problems variable was created so that higher scores would indicate higher problems, i.e., lower English knowledge. This variable is referred to in the text as communication problems reverse- scored.

Average scores were calculated for all subtests from the English language tests and converted to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics for the English Language Needs Questionnaire were calculated first.

Figure 3. Means and Interquartile Ranges (ranges between 25th and 75th percentile) of the Items of the English Language Needs Questionnaire. On the horizontal scale, 1 represents 'Strongly agree,' and 5 represents 'Strongly disagree.'
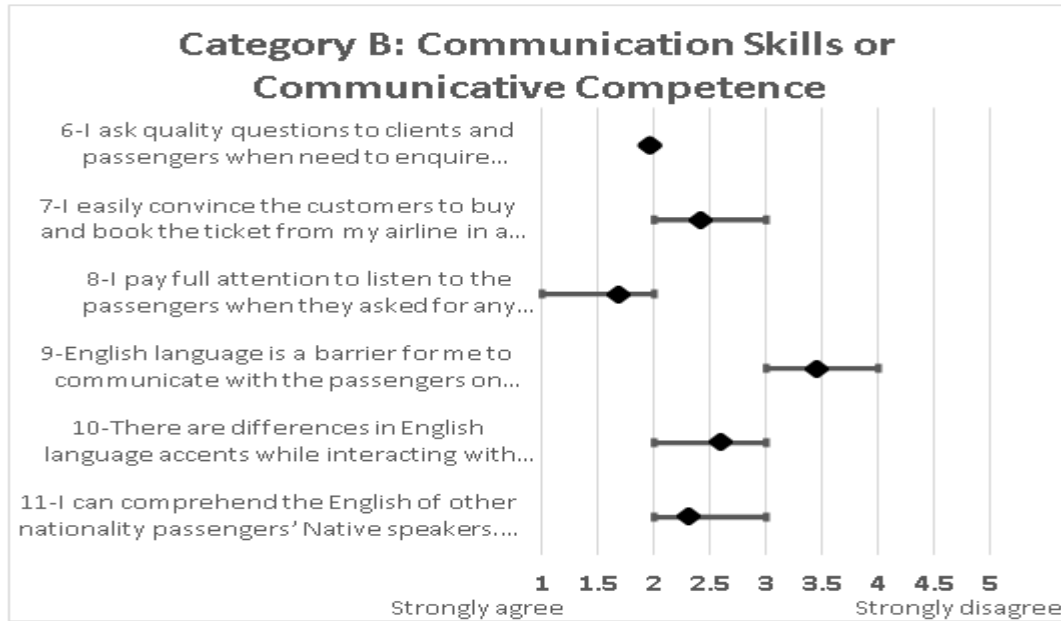

Figure 4. Means and Interquartile Ranges of Items of Category C: English for Specific Purposes or English for Vocational Purposes Items of the English Language Needs Questionnaire. On the horizontal scale, 1 represents 'Strongly agree,' and 5 represents 'Strongly disagree.'
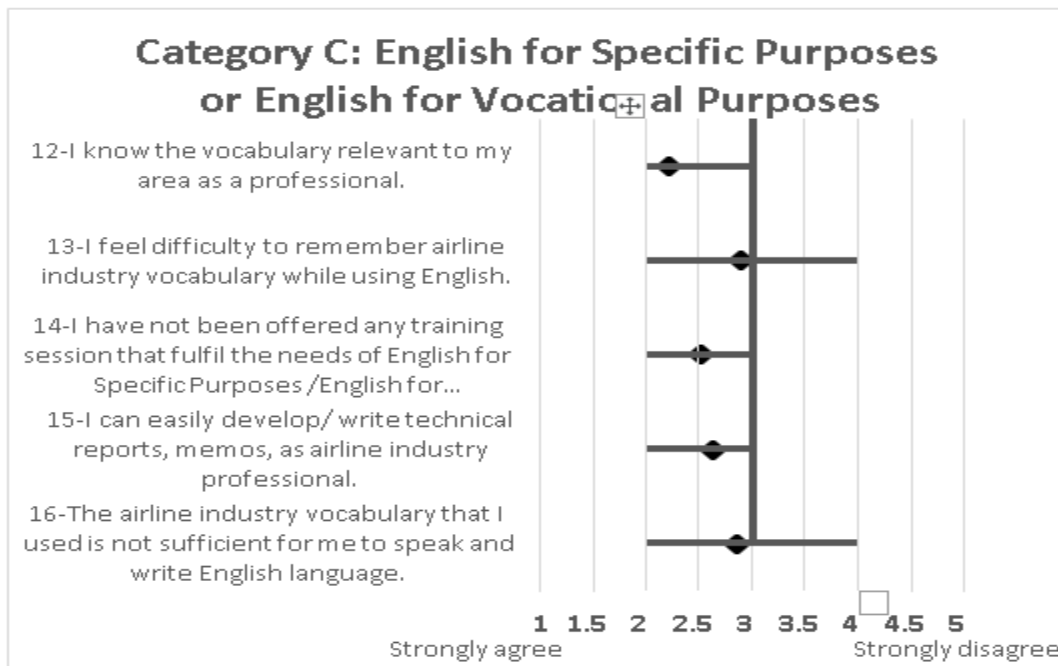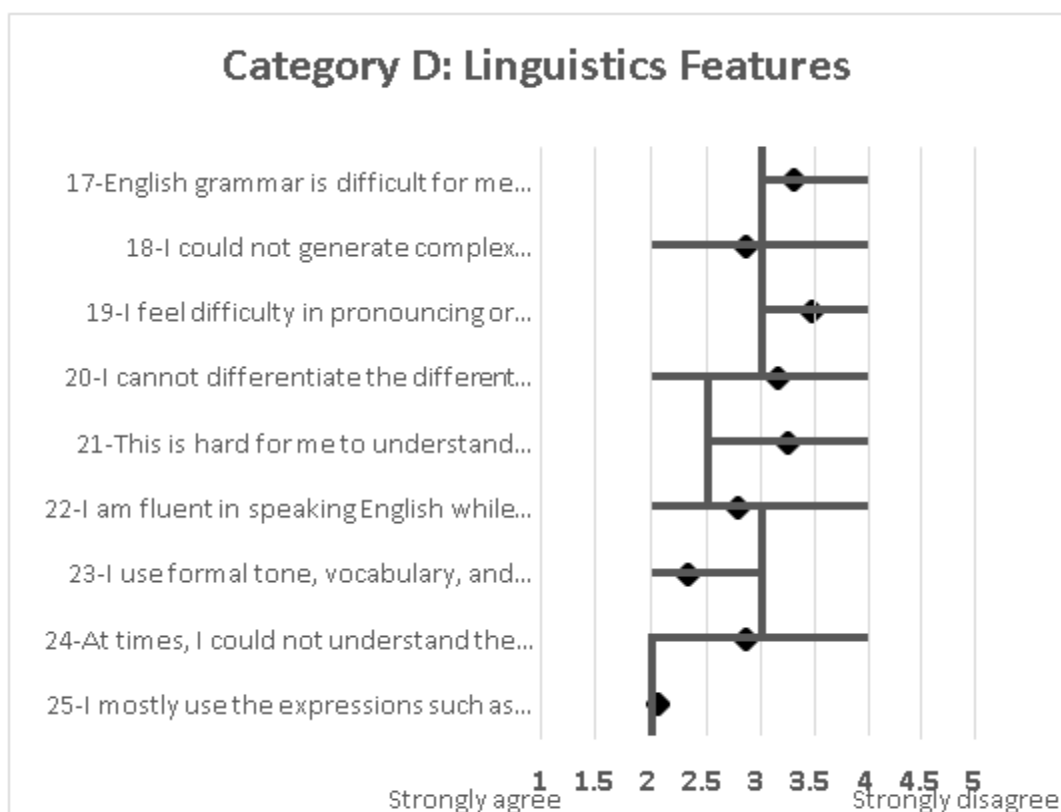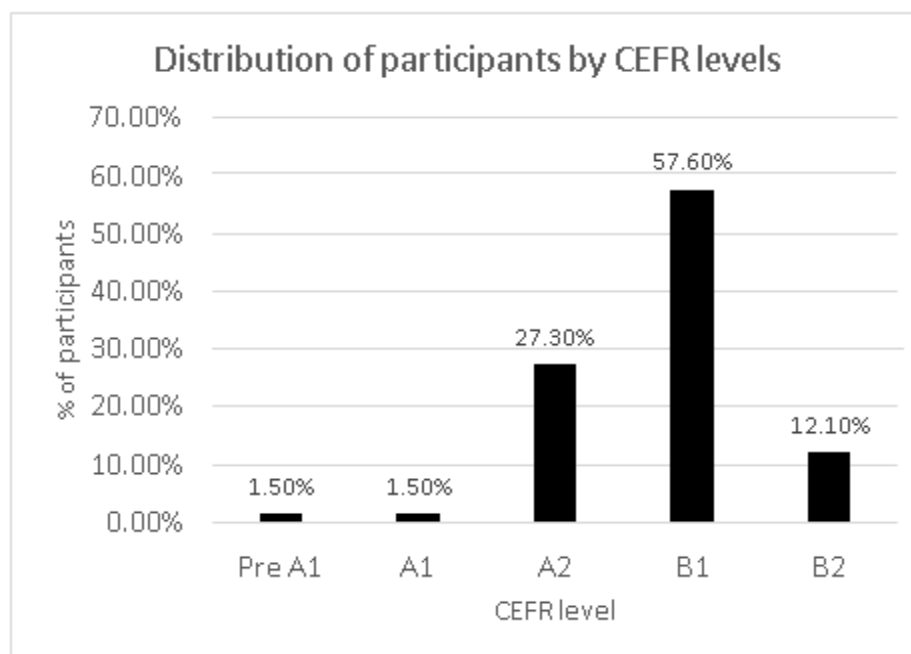

Figure 5. Means and Interquartile Ranges of Items of Category D: Linguistics Features Items of the English Language Needs Questionnaire. On the horizontal scale, 1 represents 'Strongly agree,' and 5 represents 'Strongly disagree.'

The distribution of participants' CEFR levels is given in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Distribution of Participants' CEFR Levels

Inspection of the distributions of the English Language Needs Questionnaire items revealed that the answers of most participants on the scale items tended to be grouped around two to three responses in each question. The lowest variability was found in the answers to the Category B questions, where the interquartile ranges spanned only the two neighboring scores.

Inspection of the distribution of the participants' CEFR scores showed that the English language knowledge of more than half of the participants corresponded to the B1 level. On the other hand, 30% of participants had English knowledge on the A level or below (1 participant on the pre-A1 level).

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and internal consistency reliabilities of the four scores of the English Language Needs Questionnaire.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency Reliabilities of the English Language Needs Questionnaire Scores

	Mean	SE of Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha	McDonald's omega
Category A : Language Skills	2.65	0.07	0.57	-0.04	-0.06	0.567	0.580
CategoryB : Communication Skills or Communicative Competence	2.86	0.07	0.60	-0.28	0.68	0.598	0.606
Category C : English for Specific Purposes or English for Vocational Purposes	2.92	0.07	0.60	-0.06	0.05	0.567	0.541
Category D : Linguistics Features	2.89	0.07	0.63	-0.42	-0.65	0.830	0.807

Figure 8. Means and 95% Confidence Intervals of the Mean of English Language Needs Questionnaire

The means of all four English language questionnaire scores were slightly above the neutral level, towards the pole that indicates adequate (or high) English-level skills. Looking at the distributions of the scores, skewness, and kurtosis values indicated that their shapes do not deviate significantly from the shape of the theoretical normal distributions. Both skewness and kurtosis values are within the ±1 (Hahs-Vaughn & Lomax, 2020; Hedrih & Hedrih, 2022).

Looking at the scale internal consistency reliability indicators, Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega both show that only the Category D: Linguistic Features items have good reliability if considered a single dimension. The other three categories only pass the most liberal interpretation of minimum acceptable reliability, but they do pass it (they are above 0.5).

The comparison of means on the four scores shows that participants reported their Category A: Language Skills were somewhat better, or they were more confident in them compared to the other skills. To see whether this finding can be generalised, repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on the four scales. Results showed that the model as a whole was statistically significant at $p<0.001$, indicating that the means are likely not the same in the population. Partial eta squared was 0.158, indicating a medium size difference. The difference in means is between Category A: Language Skills and the other three scores. Next, inspired by the low internal consistency of the three scales, factor analysis was conducted to see whether the latent structure of scale answers was adequately described by four factors, as the division into four categories of skills would suggest. Horn's parallel analysis indicated that two factors should be optimal to describe the latent structure of the English Language Needs Questionnaire responses. The factor loadings of items on these two factors after oblique promax factor rotation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Factor Loadings and Uniqueness of English Language Needs Questionnaire Items, 2-factor Promax-rotated Solution, Principal Axis Factoring used as the Factoring Method

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Total
Correlation between factors = -0.474			
Factor eigenvalues as % of variance explained	18.3%	13.2%	31.5%
	Factor 1 loadings	Factor 2 loadings	Uniqueness
1. I have command over all four English language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing.			0.902
2. Listening and reading English is quite difficult for me to comprehend.	0.457		0.828
3. I can develop official documents in English writing when needed.	-0.364		0.740
4. I think I need to polish my English language speaking skills.			0.801
5. I can proficiently communicate with clients and passengers in English when needed.		0.820	0.408
6. I ask quality questions to clients and passengers when I need to enquire about anything while interacting face- to-face or on mobile.		0.689	0.577
7. I easily convince the customers to buy and book the ticket from my airline in a logical way.		0.804	0.446
8. I pay full attention to listening to the passengers when they ask for any information or help required related to ticketing, booking, traveling, etc.			0.876
9. The English language is a barrier to communicating with the passengers at the airport.	0.434		0.753
10. There are differences in English language accents while interacting with passengers at airport counters that I could not understand.	0.378		0.872
11. I can comprehend the English of other nationality passengers' Native speakers. (6)		0.475	0.686
12. I know the vocabulary relevant to my area as a professional.		0.371	0.744
13. I have difficulty remembering airline industry vocabulary while using English.	0.521		0.603
14. I have not been offered any training session that fulfills the needs of English for Specific Purposes /English for Vocational Purposes during my tenure.			0.970
15. I can easily develop/write technical reports, and memos as an airline industry professional.		0.461	0.788
16. The airline industry vocabulary that I used is not sufficient for me to speak and write the English language.	0.449		0.776
17. English grammar is difficult for me to use. I could not understand the content and functional categories.	0.630		0.641
18. I could not generate complex sentences while communicating with the officials and passengers when speaking.	0.785		0.395
19. I have difficulty pronouncing or correctly spelling English words.	0.716		0.480
20. I cannot differentiate between the different varieties or accents of the English language, which causes misunderstandings during communication (face-to-face or on mobile).	0.591		0.668
21. It is hard for me to understand what words go together while collocating them into phrases.	0.820		0.300
22. I am fluent in English while communicating with passengers at the airport.		0.545	0.494
23. I use formal tone, vocabulary, and sentences when using English in Speaking or Writing.		0.437	0.822
24. At times, I could not understand the meaning in context when some natives interact with me.	0.671		0.648
25. I mostly use expressions such as 'well,' 'oh,' 'now,' 'then,' 'you know,' 'I mean,' and 'because,' when interacting with passengers at the airport.	0.311		0.897

Results of the exploratory factor analysis indicate that the first factor primarily consists of negatively phrased items (that were reverse coded in the original scores), while the second factor consists of positively phrased items (that were not reverse coded in the original score calculations). Items 1, 4, 8, and 14 had very high uniqueness and no substantial loadings on any of the two factors and were thus excluded from the calculation of these two scores.

Due to their contents, the first factor was named Communication Problems, and the second was named English Language Skills. They were calculated by averaging items with substantial loadings on that particular factor. Items 1, 4, 8, and 14 had very high

uniqueness and no substantial loadings on either of the two factors and were thus excluded from the calculation of these two scores. When calculating these scores, items with negative factor loadings were reverse-coded. Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients of these two scales are presented in Table 4. Additionally, to make a comparison with the English language skills score mean more meaningful, a reverse- scored variant of Communication Problems was calculated. In this variant, higher scores indicate more negative values (i.e., more problems) in the same way that higher values in English language skills indicate a more negative situation (i.e., lower English language skills)

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Statistics of the two English Language Need Questionnaire Scores created based on the Results of Factor Analysis

	Mean	SE of Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha	Mc Donald's omega
Communication problems (higher values indicate fewer problems)	3.07	0.07	0.60	0.44	-0.46	0.85	0.86
Communication problems reverse scored (higher values indicate more problems)	2.93	0.07	0.61	-0.44	-0.46	0.85	0.86
English language skills (higher values indicate lower skill levels)	2.33	0.07	0.59	0.58	0.96	0.80	0.81

An inspection of the descriptives of the new scores showed that, on average, participants perceived communication problems as more of an issue than the lack of English language skills. They are prone to indicate more problems in communication than in a lack of English language skills (the difference between means-paired samples t-test p<0.001, Cohen's d=0.950), at least on the items of this questionnaire. The difference between ratings given to items belonging to communication problems and to those related to English language problems and the correlation between these two factors indicated that study participants linked their English language knowledge with communication problems but perceived the latter as substantially more serious than the former.

Mean differences in the English Language Needs Questionnaire scores, using both types of scores, did not show statistically significant differences between means of groups by education level.

The need for better English language skills

Finally, participants were divided into two categories based on their scores on the English Language Needs Questionnaire: those who were generally positive about their skills and abilities and those who were generally negative. Participants whose scores were below three were considered to be positive about their English language skills and abilities because they tended to agree more with statements indicating adequate levels of language skills and abilities. In contrast, those with scores above three were considered to be more negative. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Shares of Participants Who were More Positive and Those Who were More Negative about Various Aspects of their English Language Abilities as Specified in the English Language Needs Questionnaire

	Higher abilities – fewer problems	Lower abilities – fewer problems
Category A: Language Skills	78.10%	21.90%
Category B: Communication Skills or Communicative Competence	65.80%	34.20%
Category C: English for Specific Purposes or English for Vocational Purposes	64.40%	35.60%
Category D: Linguistics Features	52.10%	47.90%
Communication problems reverse-scored	46.60%	53.40%
English language skills	91.80%	8.20%

The results showed that the share of participants that tended to evaluate their English language skills negatively was relatively low—8.20% based on the factor-based scores and 21.90% on the Category A: Language Skills score. Those tending to evaluate their English language skills more negatively ranged from 34.2% to 53.40%.

The distribution of the CEFR English language levels of the participants showed that the English language skills of 30.3% of the participants did not reach the B1 level. The results also indicated that a substantial portion of participants required further English language education for adequate communication with clients and conducting business activities in English.

The definition of the A2 level of English knowledge is that the person with that level of knowledge 'can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). He/she can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct

exchange of information on familiar and routine matters; can describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate need.' (Global Scale, 2023). Working with airline passengers and in international settings often requires more complex communication. The results indicated that the English knowledge level of a substantial share of personnel was not sufficient for these tasks. This was corroborated by the results of the English Language Needs Questionnaire, which also showed a similar or higher percentage of participants reporting substantial issues in effectively communicating in English.

Looking at the research questions and the hypothesis

RQ 1. Do Arabic airline ground staff efficiently use English language skills when performing their duties?

Results showed that while a large proportion of study participants reported generally positive experiences with their English language skills when performing their duties, between 34.20% and 53.40% of study participants reported communication experiences that were more negative than positive (i.e., they tended to disagree more with items stating that they were able to communicate effectively in English). Very few participants gave responses indicating little or no communication issues. Additionally, 30.3% of participants had an English language level of A2 or lower, which is effectively insufficient for effective communication in English outside of very narrow and routine circumstances. This language knowledge level was also not sufficient for understanding more detailed or complex issues the airline clients might wish to communicate.

RQ 2. Do the Arabic airline ground staff lack English knowledge while interacting with people at the airport?

The English language test showed that 12.10% of participants had English skills corresponding to the B2 level. An additional 57.60% demonstrated English knowledge corresponding to B1, while 30.3% demonstrated English language knowledge below the B1 level, i.e., A2 or lower. While it can be argued that the B1 level might be adequate for most situations encountered while communicating with airline clients, the abilities of individuals with the A2 level knowledge, and particularly of those below that level, are much more limited. The results suggested that roughly 30% to 50% of study participants needed improvements in their knowledge of English for effective interaction with people at the airport.

Hypothesis: A substantial proportion of Arabic airline ground staff experience problems communicating effectively in English due to their insufficient knowledge of the English language.

The hypothesis is confirmed. Results show that roughly 30% to 50% of study participants need to improve their English knowledge and skills to communicate in English effectively.

5. Discussion and Conclusion
The data collected from the English Language Needs Questionnaires showed a very nuanced picture of the different levels of English language proficiency of the airline staff. It showed that most of the participants exhibited proficiency at the B1 level. The findings revealed that English language training programs should not just focus on language skills but also incorporate adult communication methods to diversify the communication of the airline staff. The study found that the target population suggested that they were quite competent in day-to-day communication. However, the rest of them, almost 30 %, did not have this kind of ease with using English for daily communication. They operated on a level at par with or lower than A2. Between 30 and 50 % of the candidates needed additional training for their language proficiency. The findings align with the conclusions drawn by Phitakphongphan (2016), who identified the necessity of speaking and listening skills because their target research population felt that they must learn the English language for their future endeavors and professional purposes.
An essential result of this disparity is the need for more sophisticated and better-tailored English teaching programs specifically for diverse students and learners. Such a program needs to focus specifically on the proficiency gap shown by the analyzed data. The results also showed that some participants had specifically pointed out their struggle with daily communication despite having good English language skills. The findings align with the study of Cahyani et al. (2018), who emphasized the importance of customizing English language training to meet the specific needs of aviation staff. Similarly, the findings also align with Kaya (2021), who postulated that there is a dire need to develop a vocational English language curriculum to address the specific skills required in the aviation industry. The findings also reveal that a substantial portion of the aviation staff required English language education to communicate with airline customers effectively. They felt that for the smooth conduct of business, they needed a drastic improvement in their language skills. The findings align with Singh et al. (2021), who contended that it is essential to introduce aviation staff to English language training programs not only to improve their language skills but also to improve the conduct of business.
The research also found that linguistic diversity is a significant factor affecting the communication of aviation staff. This suggests that language training for aviation staff should focus on the practical application of language skills. The findings align with Gaoqiang's (2021) study, which also postulated that language training in the aviation industry should not only work on the

mechanics of language but also introduce a curriculum that would focus on the practical application of language skills in a linguistically diverse environment.

The study reinforces the research thesis that many aviation staff confront serious communication problems while performing their day-to-day jobs. The English language courses and sources available for learning need to be better tailored and coupled with training initiatives at various stages of employment. In the end, the research advocates for more rigorous interventions for enhancing English language proficiency, communication skills, and the overall execution of job responsibilities of the aviation staff. A significant contribution of the article is that it adds to an already existing body of knowledge on teaching and learning. The article highlights the critical role of the English language and the need for proficiency in it for Arabic airline ground staff. The analysis presented in the article highlights the urgency of addressing this issue through rigorous interventions through better-tailored teaching modules and training initiatives. Stakeholders in this context can draw upon this research to understand more specific requirements, needs, and wants of the staff and how to accomplish them more effectively. They can also learn how to motivate staff to learn English to enrich the passengers' overall experience and safety, thereby enhancing the aviation industry.

Conflicts of Interest: Declare conflicts of interest or state "The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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