

SURVEY

Quantifying the Impact of English Upskilling on Worker Mobility and Retention



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According to a May 2023 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report on foreign-born workers, immigrants, refugees, and speakers of other languages now represent nearly one in five U.S. workers.¹

However, English instruction largely remains a workforce development afterthought: According to Migration Policy Institute, the U.S. currently has the capacity to serve just 4% of adult English learners.²

Against that backdrop, a growing number of U.S. companies are investing in employer-sponsored “English upskilling” programs to attract and retain talent for hard-to-fill roles, and in sectors that continue to face acute labor shortages.

Overview

- The U.S. currently serves the needs of just 4% of adult English learners,³ the result of overbooked classes, outdated pedagogy, and transportation and childcare challenges.
- In a moment where health care, manufacturing, retail, and hospitality companies continue to face endemic labor market shortages, a growing number of employers are investing in English upskilling programs to grow their talent pipeline, promote and retain incumbent workers.
- Findings from a survey of more than 6,000 U.S. workers across more than 230 companies, including Amazon, Chobani, Target, Walmart, and Taziki's Mediterranean Café suggest that English upskilling investments not only allow employers to attract more workers, but also can have a direct impact on promotion and retention.
- This year's survey findings reinforce the dual bottom line benefit of English upskilling, helping employers of all sizes to expand their talent pool, while also boosting career and economic mobility for a significant and fast-growing segment of the U.S. workforce.

Methodology

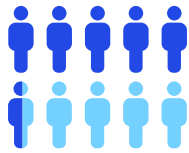
From December 2022 to January 2023, EnGen fielded a multilingual survey to 6,261 U.S. workers who were immigrants, refugees, and speakers of other languages. The response rate was 10%.

All survey participants were adult English learners who received access to English upskilling through their workplaces or enrollment in educational institutions.

Respondents



Survey respondents come from dozens of countries and speak more than two dozen languages.



57% of respondents accessed English upskilling through their employers.



43% accessed English upskilling via community colleges, libraries, and state government initiatives.

What Is English Upskilling?

English upskilling uses career-specific content customized for working adult learners.

Learning content on EnGen's online platform, for example, features more than 125 industry-focused pathways with lessons that can be completed in as little as 10 minutes, along with live instruction and career-aligned coaching.

EnGen's unique approach to English upskilling is tailored to workplace needs, and accessible to learners of all levels.

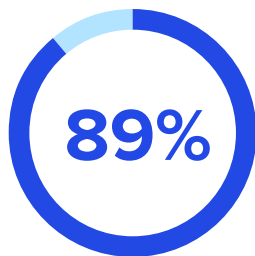
Adult English learners access the platform on demand, often on a computer during breaks at work or on a mobile device at home.

Findings

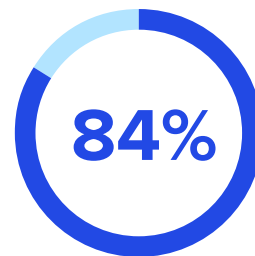
Insight 1: English upskilling enables employers to grow their talent pool and increase the odds of retaining workers.

In a tight labor market, workers prefer employers that offer opportunities for career growth, education and training⁴ – and workers from immigrant and refugee backgrounds are no exception.

Nearly 60% of total survey respondents access the EnGen platform via their employers. Their responses indicate that access to English upskilling is an attractive benefit to both incumbent and potential workers.



will likely stay with their company because EnGen is an employee benefit.



will likely refer a friend to their company because EnGen is an employee benefit.

“I’ve received a promotion and can speak more.”

— Chobani employee

“At work, I translated for my people to understand my manager when he spoke to them.” — Amazon employee

“I would recommend this for all employees for having more confidence in daily life.”

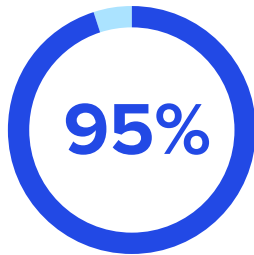
— Employee at a global hospitality company



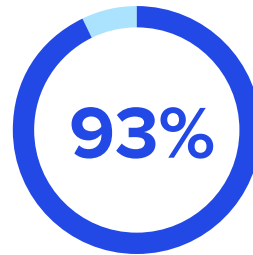
Insight 2: Confidence in using English is as important as proficiency.

Conventional wisdom links language learners' progress to proficiency, an abstract term tied to arbitrary standards and test scores. However, this year's survey suggests that an equally critical determinant of working adults' success is confidence in using English: Having the vocabulary to communicate effectively on the job and at home.

Indeed, while 92% of EnGen learners improved their average English proficiency scores on an objective assessment, even more reported other critical gains:



improved their confidence in using English.



report saving time at work as a result of improved English skills.

“Before I used the translator for everything today I don't do it so often” — Walmart employee

“I can have a conversation with my manager now.”
— Amazon employee

“Before, answering phone calls used to stress me out a lot because it was hard for me to understand what they were asking me or why they were calling me, now I feel more secure when talking on the phone.” — New York Public Library learner

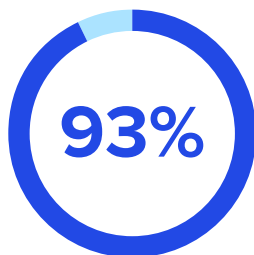


Insight 3: English upskilling belongs in the flow of work.

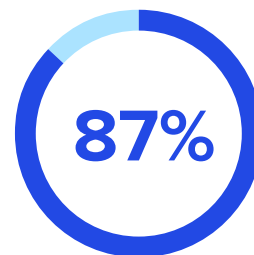
Historically, workforce development programs have treated English as a prerequisite to participation in training opportunities: Speakers of other languages were required to demonstrate some level of English proficiency before applying for jobs or learning new skills.

This year’s survey findings suggest that the integration of English upskilling into the flow of work and workforce development had a significant, positive effect on worker outcomes.

Companies like Macy’s, Walmart, Taziki’s and more are experiencing the benefits of offering English upskilling as part of on-site training programs, allowing learners to acquire both language and career skills simultaneously in order to accelerate development of in-demand skills for roles where employers face a shortage of talent.



of learners said their job skills have improved as a result of using EnGen.



of learners achieved a career goal as a result of English upskilling, like a pay raise or promotion.

“I have been able to converse better with customers.”

— Macy’s employee

“I have learned to answer phone calls at work.”

— Walmart employee

“Because of my English training, Taziki’s offered me a new position – now I take orders with customers and I chat with them.”

— Taziki’s Mediterranean Café employee



Insight 4: Sector-specific English upskilling drives better outcomes.

English is a skill that can be mastered with repeated, real-life practice, yet the instructor-led approach used for decades by employers treats English as a content area, focusing instead on grammar rules or abstract language theory.

Outdated teaching methods, coupled with logistical issues related to work schedules, transportation, childcare, and overbooked classes, make most instruction both inaccessible and ineffective for adult English learners.

This year’s survey results point to the promise of career-aligned, personalized, on-demand instruction within the employment context.

A plurality

of learners agreed that EnGen’s approach to instruction was more effective than learning in a traditional classroom setting.⁵

54.9



is the Net Promoter Score (NPS) for EnGen amongst survey respondents; 30 is considered a strong NPS score.⁶

“I took English lessons at a high school in Ukraine, but I couldn't speak. After the EnGen course, I became more confident.”

— Amazon employee

“I took 6 months of class at a private school but my listening has improved a lot with EnGen.”

— Massachusetts Adult and Community Learning Services learner

“The program is easily accessible at home and gives workers who don't have time to commute to school an opportunity to study English.” — Amazon employee

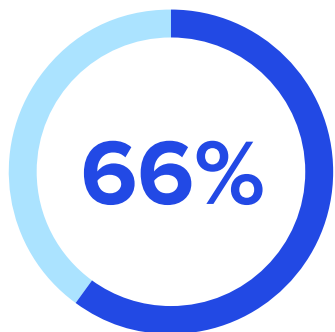


Insight 5: Older workers and English learners can overcome digital literacy gaps.

Although many English learners have low levels of digital literacy, this year's survey results suggest that online modalities for English upskilling are both accessible for workers who are still building digital literacy skills and can support the development of those skills, even in older learners.

This year, 36% of survey respondents were between the ages of 40 and 49, and 30% were over 50. This finding is striking because older adults are often overlooked when it comes to technology-mediated learning solutions, with the assumption that they lack the interest or digital literacy to use them.

The age range of EnGen language learners suggests that older adults can and will use digital tools if they are given the resources and support to navigate them.



of survey respondents were over the age of 40.

"I am 50 years old, and now I feel capable because of EnGen."
— ProLiteracy Learner

"My self esteem has changed."
— Walmart employee (Guild)

"I'm able to communicate via text, email, over the phone and in person. I ❤️ taking learning modules and challenging myself. It's a learning experience for all ages in life."
— Employee at a global hospitality company





About EnGen

EnGen is a Certified B Corporation that delivers personalized, career-aligned, mobile-first English language upskilling to immigrants, refugees, and speakers of other languages across the U.S. Using patented technology that has served over 4 million language learners worldwide, EnGen is powered by real-world, career-aligned content and coaching.

The platform's science-based, sector-specific approach is proven to help adult learners – internationally trained professionals and those with limited formal education – meet their educational and employment goals in high-demand fields. Working with Fortune 500 companies, regional employers, higher education, apprenticeship programs, and government institutions, EnGen is advancing economic mobility, workforce inclusion, and talent pipeline development at the scale needed to serve both New American workers and the demands of the U.S. labor market.

[GETENGEN.COM](https://www.getengen.com)

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Endnotes

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Labor Force Characteristics of Foreign-born Workers Summary,” May 18, 2023.

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/forbrn.nr0.htm>

² Margie McHuge and Catrina Doxsee, “English Plus Integration: Shifting the Instructional Paradigm for Immigrant Adult Learners to Support Integration Success,” Migration Policy Institute, October 2018.

https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/AdultEd_EnglishPlusIntegration_Final.pdf

³ Margie McHuge and Catrina Doxsee, “English Plus Integration: Shifting the Instructional Paradigm for Immigrant Adult Learners to Support Integration Success,” Migration Policy Institute, October 2018.

https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/AdultEd_EnglishPlusIntegration_Final.pdf

⁴ Guild Education, 2023 American Workforce Survey,

<https://insights.quilddeducation.com/>

⁵ Due to a formatting error in the survey, responses to this question were difficult to analyze.

⁶ Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a customer experience metric that is reported on a scale from -100 to 100. NPS indicates the extent to which the surveyed population would recommend something (in this case, EnGen) to a friend. NPS is calculated as the percentage of detractors subtracted from the percentage of promoters. If everyone were a promoter, it would be a score of positive 100. Good NPS scores are +30 or above.

⁷ Saida Mamdeova and Emily Pawlowski, “A Description of U.S. Adults Who Are Not Digitally Literate,” U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, May 2018. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018161.pdf>

⁸ EnGen has developed digital literacy courses to equip learners with essential tech skills as they learn English.

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