

Abstract

Study aims and methodology

1. This Study gathers information on employers' requirements and expectations of the English language competencies of their employees, and assesses the gap between the perceived and expected English language competencies pertaining to the local employees. The Study involves two phases with Phase I involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 40 employers and 20 employees, and Phase II in the form of a questionnaire survey on 102 employers and 1,001 employees aged between 20 and 29 who have attended the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination or the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, and/or the Hong Kong Advanced Level Education Examination.

Study findings

2. The Study shows that employers in general expected their administrative staff to possess basic English reading and writing abilities and they expected frontline staff, such as receptionists and sales of the retail sector, to have basic English speaking abilities. As for "senior working level/frontline staff" and "middle managers", most employers expected them to achieve an intermediate or advanced level of English language proficiency.
3. Employers in general were satisfied with English language competencies of the employees, because they had fulfilled the employers' basic English language requirements, although there was room for improvement. Employers also indicated that their employees were generally weak in listening and speaking and better at writing.
4. As for employees, they generally considered themselves capable of handling simple conversations in English. Regarding English writing, most of them considered that they were capable of handling simple email correspondences in English. Nevertheless, they had a more negative view of their reading abilities and opined that they had difficulty in comprehending complicated documents. On the whole, most of them believed that they could generally meet or even exceed their employers' expectations in all job-related tasks.
5. Comparing the views of employers and employees, the Study shows that while employers put more focus on writing skills, employees perceived that listening skills were more important. Employees who considered that they could not meet their employers' expectations of their English language proficiency were likely to be those who considered that their secondary school education might not have fully equipped them with the necessary English language skills required for their current jobs, and that their secondary schools failed to develop their confidence and interest sufficiently in the use of English.