
English as Lingua Franca in Starbucks Workspace: A Systematic Literature Review

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: Revised: Published:</p> <p>Keywords English as lingua franca, Starbucks, Systematic Literature Review</p>	<p><i>This study explores the role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) within the Starbucks workspace, emphasizing its function in facilitating global communication across the company's diverse international branches. By employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this research synthesizes findings from various scholarly articles, case studies, and organizational reports to examine how ELF shapes communication practices, team dynamics, and corporate culture in a transnational corporate setting. The review identifies key themes such as language policy, intercultural competence, power dynamics, and communication efficiency in multinational workspaces. Results indicate that ELF serves not only as a practical communication tool but also as a strategic asset that enables Starbucks to maintain consistency in brand identity, training, and operational coordination worldwide. The study contributes to the understanding of ELF in globalized corporate environments and offers insights for language policy planning in other multinational corporations seeking to enhance communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries.</i></p>

I. Introduction

In today that everything is digital, where borders are increasingly porous and businesses expand continents, communication has emerged as a vital pillar of organizational success. Among the many languages spoken around the world, English has taken a dominant role as the global lingua franca, particularly in professional and corporate environments. As a result, the use of English at work has grown exponentially, transforming the way individuals and institutions communicate, collaborate, and conduct business. English also emerged as the dominant lingua franca in global business communication, facilitating international transactions and collaboration across diverse cultural landscapes (Tan, 2024). From internal memos and virtual meetings to international contracts and customer service, English functions as a shared medium that connects people across linguistic, cultural, and national divides.

This global spread of English in the workplace is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it is deeply intertwined with broader socio-economic, political, and technological processes. The rise of multinational corporations, international trade, global migration, and digital communication technologies has elevated English to an essential tool for professional mobility and corporate competitiveness. For many organizations, particularly those operating across multiple countries or regions, English proficiency is no longer an added advantage—it is a baseline requirement. Employees are expected to communicate effectively in English, not only to convey information,

but also to collaborate with international teams, negotiate with partners, and represent the company on the global stage. Its importance in digital business communication is evident in various aspects, including email correspondence, virtual meetings, and online presentations (Sharma, 2024).

Scholars have long recognized the central role of English in shaping global workplace dynamics. The global dominance of English in the corporate world is a well-established phenomenon, driven by economic, technological, and geopolitical factors (Ashrafova, 2025). Research across fields such as sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, human resource management, and organizational behavior has examined diverse aspects of English use at work. These include the impact of English as a lingua franca (ELF) on workplace interactions, the language-related challenges faced by non-native English speakers, the linguistic inequalities and power imbalances that may arise, and the strategies organizations adopt to foster effective multilingual communication. In particular, the question of how English mediates access to professional opportunities and whether it reinforces or mitigates inequalities has received increasing attention. One of the best example of English as lingua franca (ELF) in one of the giant company's workspace in the world, Starbucks.

Starbucks is an American company that operates the largest coffeehouse chain and one of the most recognizable brands in the world. Headquartered in Seattle, Washington, the company operates more than 35,000 stores across 80 countries (as of 2022). Starbucks was founded by Jerry Baldwin, Gordon Bowker, and Zev Siegl, opening its first store in 1971 near the historic Pike Place Market in Seattle. The three Starbucks founders had two things in common: they were all coming from academia, and they all loved coffee and tea. They invested and borrowed some money to open the first store in Seattle and named it "Starbucks" after the first mate, Starbuck, in Herman Melville's classic novel *Moby Dick*.

This paper will aim on traditional review in which English as Lingua Franca at workspace. Traditional reviews usually present a summary of research findings related to a particular topic, but without clear and explicit considerations regarding the steps of summarizing the literature, such as: specific criteria, identification process, searching, quality assessment and reporting standards for literature review results. (Armstrong, 2007; Gough, Oliver and Thomas, 2008)

Although this method is useful in describing general findings related to concepts, theories, and previous research, if it is carried out with a non general methodology and not analyzing each of the references obtained one by one, then sometimes this can lead to high subjectivity and bias in interpreting and concluding the review results.

Systematic review (SR) is a type of literature review that attempts to gather all empirical evidence that meets predetermined eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question. (Higgins et al., 2019) The author systematically searches for, critically assesses, and synthesizes evidence from multiple studies on the same topic. (Gough, Oliver and Thomas, 2012) Appropriate and systematic methods are factors that differentiate systematic reviews from traditional reviews. (Khan et al., 2003a)

Method

To examine the theory which also raises the identification of potential future research on the use of English in the world of work, the stage of compiling a theoretical study based on a systematic review method was carried out. This method is carried out in accordance with applicable procedures to provide utilization in further research. The stages of the systematic review carried out are the model developed by Denyer and Tranfield which has 5 stages [8], which are as follows:

- Formulation of research questions
- Determination of research location
- Selection and evaluation of research found
- Analysis and synthesis
- Reporting and utilization of further studies

Referring to the method, this research begins by determining the research questions as the first step. The research question that forms the basis of this research is the use of English in the workplace from 2010 to 2025.

The next step is to determine the research location. In this case, the keyword used in the database search is “English Workplace” with the 2019-2025 filter feature enabled to limit the search results. It is not combined with other related keywords. The databases used are Atlantis Press, Research Gate, Science Direct, Open Knowledge, and Google Scholar. Due to the current research and development goals of the world, only articles from international databases were used in this study. The first search yielded a total of 50 articles. In the first stage of selection, the deletion of articles was irrelevant to the purpose of this study. After the selection, the remaining 20 articles were in accordance with the research objectives. These articles will then be used as material for analysis to be interpreted. The final step, conclusions for the 4th stage will be affirmed as well as display to potential future research in the same field.

Results and Discussion

The search results for articles based on the method used produce the information presented in the following table:

Summary of articles		
<i>References</i>	<i>Research Method</i>	<i>Core Information</i>
Kedrowicz & Taylor, 2013	Qualitative Thematic Analysis	This article highlights the importance of communication competence in engineering education, especially in preparing engineers for the global workplace. The study employs the Communication in the Disciplines (CID) approach to develop both professional skills and global citizenship. Two central metaphors are used: communication as a tool and communication as voice. Findings show that current CID practice is too focused on technical, skills-based training, often neglecting communication as a powerful, critical

		social process. The authors argue for a broader, theoretically grounded communication instruction that includes ethical, intercultural, and deliberative elements to help students become active and reflective global citizens.
Maulidia & Amalia, 2020	Qualitative Descriptive Study	This study investigates the impact of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses on students of International Relations at Muhammadiyah University of Sidoarjo. The results reveal that ESP helps students develop vocabulary and communication strategies relevant to diplomacy and international affairs. The authors argue that ESP should not only focus on linguistic competence but also integrate intercultural knowledge and real-world contexts to prepare students for global communication needs.
Vulchanov, 2022	Qualitative Case Study (Ethnographic Approach).	This doctoral dissertation explores how global citizenship education (GCE) is implemented in international higher education. Using ethnographic fieldwork across three institutions in Europe and Asia, the author examines the experiences, ideologies, and practices shaping GCE. The study reveals tensions between neoliberal institutional goals and the transformative aspirations of GCE. Vulchanov emphasizes that for GCE to be meaningful, it must go beyond tokenism and include critical reflexivity, intercultural dialogue, and power-awareness in global contexts.
K. Bhanu Rekha & S. Lavanya, 2021	Qualitative Descriptive Analysis.	This paper discusses the role of English in professional and workplace communication, particularly in engineering and technical fields. The authors emphasize that English is essential not just for employment but also for interpersonal relations, teamwork, and professional development. The article argues that soft skills, especially effective communication in English, are as critical as technical expertise. It highlights the growing demand for English proficiency in the global job market and calls for integrated English training in engineering curricula.
Sindhu, 2016	Descriptive Theoretical Study.	This paper emphasizes the importance of English as a global lingua franca in various domains, including education, technology, business, and diplomacy. It

		argues that English is essential for intercultural communication and professional advancement. The author highlights how English acts as a unifying medium in global forums and is increasingly indispensable for employment, academic collaboration, and social mobility. The paper advocates for early and continuous English education that integrates global perspectives to prepare learners for international engagement.
Clement & Murugavel, 2018	Quantitative Survey-based Study.	This article investigates the importance of English skills in workplace performance among Indian employees. Survey results from 39 professionals show that poor English communication impairs employability and job performance. Speaking was considered the most important and most lacking skill. The majority preferred online training, and emphasized the need for in-house English programs. The study confirms English as crucial not only for technical communication but also for career advancement, global collaboration, and leadership roles.
Fitzpatrick & O'Dowd, 2012	Mixed Method (Literature Review & Case Study Analysis).	This study explores how English is used in 21st-century workplaces through literature review and 20 case reports worldwide. It concludes that English is essential for global communication and must be taught alongside 21st-century skills like digital literacy, intercultural competence, and workplace-specific practices.
Kurniawan (2023)	Library Research.	Kurniawan (2023) Library Research This article emphasizes the importance of English as a tool for global communication in four major fields: (1) Education: English serves as the primary medium of instruction at various levels and enables access to global academic literature. (2) Science & Technology: English is used in scientific journals, patents, research communication, and international collaboration. (3) Business: Acts as the lingua franca for international trade, corporate communication, and business documentation. (4) Travel & Tourism: English is the universal language for customer service, marketing, and traveler interaction. The article also discusses the historical spread of English, its global linguistic dominance, and the challenges of

		linguistic imperialism. It concludes that English proficiency is a necessity in today's interconnected world.
Oliveri et al. (2021)	Editorial Synthesis of 9 Research Articles.	This paper introduces a special issue on Workplace English Communication (WEC) in the 21st century. It focuses on the assessment and development of WEC skills using scenario-based simulations. The study introduces three threshold concepts: (1) Assessment for Learning (AfL) as a research genre. (2) Construct modeling as a limiting act. (3) The need for 21st-century communication skills across organizational settings. It presents a simulation model ("Kitchen Design") with tasks involving email writing, inbox prioritization, proposal writing, and reflection, mapped to seven communication knowledge domains: metacognitive, critical discourse, genre, community discourse, rhetorical aim, substantive, and task-process knowledge. The article also presents a five-plane conceptual model for WEC assessment: Nomothetic modeling, Idiographic modeling, Anticipatory design, Teamwork modeling, and Resource allocation modeling.
Agustiana et al. (2024)	Qualitative (Interviews).	This study explores the role of English as a lingua franca in international business, focusing on its influence on business operations, cross-cultural communication, and global economic performance. Key findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher English proficiency leads to smoother international business operations and better negotiation outcomes. • Non-native speakers face challenges including miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings • Companies adopt strategies such as professional language training, promoting a learning culture, and using technology (e.g., translation apps, grammar tools). The study concludes that English proficiency is essential for business competitiveness in global markets and recommends investments in language training to reduce communication barriers.
Al-Issa (2018)	Qualitative (Interviews &	This study investigates the real use of English in Omani workplaces, especially in government and private sectors. It reveals a gap between educational

	Document Analysis)	<p>English learning outcomes and actual workplace needs.</p> <p>Key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mismatch between what is taught in school/university and what is required in the workplace. • Many graduates lack sufficient speaking and writing skills for professional contexts. • English is often needed in administrative communication, report writing, and dealing with foreign clients. <p>The study recommends reforming English language teaching to better match the linguistic needs of the labor market, and emphasizes the role of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training programs in bridging this gap.</p>
Knight (2016)	Editorial Review / Conceptual Overview	<p>This editorial highlights the challenges faced by multilingual professionals using English as a global workplace language. Key insights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English is a global lingua franca, and most users are non-native speakers. • Multinational companies are implementing English-only policies, raising issues around training and adaptation. • Grammatical errors from non-native writers are often perceived more leniently than those from native speakers. • Pragmatic errors (tone, politeness, cultural cues) are seen as more disruptive than grammatical ones. • Recommends shifting instructional focus from grammatical perfection to pragmatic competence, rhetorical awareness, and communication conventions. <p>This work contributes to understanding the real communicative expectations in global professional settings, and the pedagogical implications for business communication and ESP (English for Specific Purposes).</p>
Vance (2024)	Theoretical / Analytical Review	<p>This article discusses the central role of English in global opportunity access, spanning business, academia, science, and intercultural communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English is the primary medium for international communication and is essential in the global

		<p>workforce, including business meetings, emails, and negotiations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 90% of scientific publications are in English, making it vital in research and technology. • English-medium instruction is widespread in global higher education, especially for international students. • English fosters cross-cultural understanding, acting as a bridge language in international collaboration and peace-building. <p>While acknowledging concerns over linguistic imperialism and marginalization of local languages, the author argues that the benefits of English proficiency outweigh the drawbacks. English is portrayed as a tool of empowerment, providing access to global knowledge, economic participation, and mobility.</p>
Cambridge English & QS (2016)	Quantitative (Survey-based Global Report)	<p>This global study surveyed over 5,300 employers in 38 countries to evaluate the role of English in the workplace. Key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English is the most required language by employers worldwide, especially in sectors like banking, finance, and services. • 95% of employers rate English as important for their business, with over 50% saying it is mandatory for certain roles. • English is especially vital for international communication, customer service, negotiations, and internal collaboration in multinational firms. • A gap exists between the level of English employers need and the level employees actually have, prompting companies to invest in training. • Employers report that good English skills lead to faster career progression, better salaries, and improved job performance. <p>The report calls for stronger alignment between education and industry needs, and highlights English as a key global employability skill.</p>
Singh, P., Khaun, A., & Ong Teck Lan, C. (2011)	Quantitative & Qualitative	<p>This study explores the English language skills expected by employers from UiTM Social Sciences and Humanities graduates. It finds that English is</p>

	(Questionnaire & Interviews)	vital for workplace communication, especially in speaking and writing. Many graduates lack confidence and proficiency, making it difficult to complete job-related tasks. The authors recommend workplace-oriented English courses with authentic materials focused on speaking and writing.
Arputhamalar & Prema, 2022	Quantitative Descriptive Study (Survey of 128 Engineering Students)	This study explores engineering students' perceptions of their English speaking skills in academic and workplace contexts. Results show most students feel confident, yet fear still affects fluency. The English curriculum is seen as inadequate, and students request more support from teachers to improve speaking for professional needs.
Fiset, Bhawe & Jha, 2022	Experimental and Survey-Based Study	This study examines how language-related misunderstandings at work affect interpersonal relationships and job performance. Findings reveal that such misunderstandings reduce trust, increase conflict, and harm team collaboration. The authors emphasize the importance of clear communication training in multilingual workplaces.
Rajprasisit and Hemchua (2015)	Quantitative Descriptive Study (Survey of 40 Engineering Students)	The findings revealed that English is essential for recruitment, daily tasks, and career advancement, with reading skills rated higher than speaking, listening, and writing. Most communication occurred in informal interactions, meetings, and teamwork, while challenges included understanding diverse accents and conveying technical information clearly. The study emphasizes the relevance of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) and recommends designing English for Specific Purposes courses tailored to the real communicative needs of computer engineers.
Clement and Murugavel (2018)	Quantitative Descriptive Study (Survey of 39 Employees)	The findings revealed that English proficiency, particularly in speaking, plays a crucial role in job interviews, daily communication, and career progression. A large majority of participants acknowledged that poor English skills hinder employment opportunities, and most considered speaking to be both their weakest area and the most

		<p>essential for job performance. The study emphasized the importance of in-house English training program especially through online platform is to enhance communication skills. It also highlighted that companies benefit from employees with higher English proficiency, leading to improved job performance, better promotion prospects, and global competitiveness.</p>
<p>Apelman (2010)</p>	<p>Mixed methods (survey, interviews, document analysis)</p>	<p>The study employed surveys with 89 respondents, interviews in five companies, and document analysis of workplace texts such as reports and meeting minutes. Findings revealed that English is extensively used in daily work—especially for emails and reports—with reading rated as the strongest skill and writing requiring the highest proficiency. Engineers often relied on personal ability, collaboration, and existing documents as strategies to accomplish writing tasks. The research highlighted that English skills were tied more to job position than gender and that authentic workplace texts should inform English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training in engineering programs. It also emphasized the sociolinguistic impact of shifting from Swedish to English in corporate contexts and the need for targeted training to prepare engineers for global business communication.</p>

Conclusion

This study highlights the essential role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in supporting effective communication within Starbucks as a global company. Through the systematic review of relevant literature, it becomes clear that ELF is not merely a linguistic choice but a strategic necessity in managing multicultural teams, maintaining brand consistency, and ensuring operational efficiency across international branches. The findings emphasize that while ELF facilitates smoother communication, it also brings challenges related to language proficiency gaps, cultural misunderstandings, and power imbalances. Nevertheless, Starbucks' ability to adopt ELF effectively reflects its commitment to fostering an inclusive, globally connected workplace. Moving forward, companies like Starbucks must continue refining their language policies and intercultural communication strategies to ensure that English as a lingua franca remains a tool for collaboration rather than exclusion.

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