



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

English use in the workplace and stress effects

*A study on the possible stress effects of increased use of English in
the workplace in Iceland*

B.A. Essay

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September 2014

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School of Humanities
Department of English

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to examine a possible relationship between English use in the workplace and perceived work stress by conducting a survey among several Icelandic companies. A review of some of the literature on English use in Iceland is presented as well as a short review of work stress factors. Data was gathered from workers' perceived stress in the workplace, perceived English proficiency, and perceived amount of English used in the workplace. Analyses from the data revealed that participants who used English often or very often in the workplace were more likely to experience stress in the workplace. According to literature on workplace stress, it can be a stress factor when workers' skills do not match the job requirements. Research on English use in Iceland suggests that Icelanders might be overestimating their English skills. Although this research will not answer the question whether those struggling with English communication skills experience more stress than those with a high proficiency in English, this will be a first attempt to identify an understudied aspect of Icelandic workplace stress.

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Introduction

In this study, English usage and perceived proficiency in the Icelandic workplace was assessed, as well as stress in the workplace.

Extensive research has been conducted on job demands and stress in the workplace. Literature and research on the use of English as a foreign language (EFL) is also extensive. However, the possible “stress factor” of using EFL in the workplace has not been extensively researched.

English as a foreign language in Iceland

Three variants of English language use are depicted in Kachru’s three-circle model: 1) the inner-circle where English is the first language e.g. the UK and USA, 2) the outer-circle areas using English as a second language (ESL) varieties, which includes many ex-colonial countries such as India and Singapore, 3) the expanding circle (EFL varieties) where English is taught in school and used for communicating with foreigners (Melchers & Shaw, 2003). However, the distinction between the terms EFL and ESL vary in the literature and definitions are often unclear (Melchers & Shaw, 2003). EFL is often categorized as a language that does not have an official status in a community and is not used extensively, while ESL is sometimes referred to as a language that is very widely used and sometimes has the status as one of the official languages in a community (Björklund, 2008).

The English language has in any case become a global communication language (McArthur, 2003) and companies around the world have increasingly been adopting English as their official company language (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006). Speakers of both EFL and ESL are likely to increase dramatically in the coming years according to a calculation using the Engco model (Graddol, 2000) which was “designed by The English Company (UK) Ltd as a means of examining the relative status of world languages based on demographic, human development and economic data” (Graddol, 2000, p.64). Economic globalization has inevitably increased the demand for English communication skills in the Icelandic workplace. In the past decade, Icelandic companies have progressively, been expanding their global operations by setting up branches in other countries. English is used regularly in Icelandic companies for the purpose of communicating at international level with foreign colleagues, clients, and

suppliers. In response, some Icelandic companies have even adopted English as their official company language (Guðrún Kvaran, 2010).

In Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir's "English in Iceland: Second Language, Foreign Language, or Neither?" (2007) the current state of the English language in Iceland is examined. Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir posits that perhaps the English language used is closer to the category of ESL than that of EFL due to the language's widespread use in the Icelandic community (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). English exposure in Iceland is considerable when it comes to reading English texts and hearing spoken English while there is not nearly as much exposure when it comes to writing and speaking English (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007). According to Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir's 2011 study on English exposure in Iceland (with over 750 respondents), close to 50% of the participants read English on a daily basis and over 85% of the survey's respondents heard English on a daily basis providing favourable conditions for acquiring receptive (reading and listening) English skills. In contrast, the environment for acquiring productive English skills, which is defined as spoken and written English, is not nearly as favourable. Less than 20% speak English on a daily basis and a little over 20% write English on a daily basis (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011). Hulda Kristín Jónsdóttir, an Adjunct at the Faculty of Foreign Language, Literature and Linguistics at the University of Iceland, is currently working on her PhD. dissertation researching English use in the business community in Iceland, "specifically within industry, banking, medical, the travel industry, academia, ICT and energy" (Hulda Kristín Jónsdóttir, 2011, p.22-23). Initial results in her study indicate that over 74% of the participants' responses analysed so far confirm the use of English on a daily basis in the workplace, and only 2.8% of the respondents use no English in the workplace (Hulda Kristín Jónsdóttir, 2011).

The type of English proficiency that Icelanders acquire in their environment is mostly informal (Anna Jeeves, 2013). Predominantly, English exposure in Iceland is contextual and colloquial: "Icelandic youth are overwhelmingly exposed to one type of register that is associated with popular culture: colloquial, informal speech mainly from visual materials" (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 54), while a more sophisticated level of English proficiency is needed for academic performance at the tertiary level, and for career purposes according to Anna Jeeves' (2013) findings. According to Samúel Lefever (2009), whose article, "Are National Curriculum objectives for teaching English being

met in Icelandic compulsory schools?”, focuses on English language teaching in Iceland and the National Curriculum’s objectives, concluding that English teaching does not focus enough on communicative activities and on spoken English (Samúel Lefever, 2009). About 90% of the curriculum within Icelandic universities is in English and for many students this is a problem (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir & Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). A study on students’ English use at the University of Iceland revealed that 44% of the respondents in the study felt that having a large part of the curriculum in English increased their workload and 37% of the students thought it was difficult or very difficult to use English textbooks (Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir & Hafdís Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). If Icelandic University students feel that using English in their studies increases their workload, it can be speculated that the same is true for these individuals once they enter the labour market.

According to a British Council report on the development and spread of English around the world, “demands on an employee’s competence in English are rising” (Graddol, 2000, p. 43). In an interview, the former rector at the University of Reykjavik, Svafa Grönfeldt, now the Chief Organizational Development Officer of Alvogen a multinational pharmaceuticals company, expressed her belief that it is important for students to acquire adequate competence in English, the language of choice in international business, because it is important to be able to work in collaboration with individuals from other countries (Silja Björk Huldudóttir, 2007). Hulda Kristín Jónsdóttir (2009) believes inadequate proficiency and communication skills in English could have a harmful effect on international business. There seems to be an immense pressure and a requirement for Icelandic workers in the international business environment to have outstanding proficiency in English (Hulda Kristín Jónsdóttir, 2009). Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007, 2011) is also concerned that Icelanders may be overestimating their overall perceived English proficiency due to their relatively advanced receptive English skills, i.e. competence in reading and understanding spoken English.

Stress and the workplace

A recent survey conducted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work within 36 European and EFTA countries showed that 55% of workers in Iceland perceived hours worked or workload to be a common cause of stress in the workplace. In the same study,

47% of workers believe instances of work associated stress are common in the workplace (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2013). An individual's perception of stress can be prevalent in situations where high physical, intellectual and/or emotional demands are experienced (Dewe, O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2010). Certain conditions in the workplace can induce feelings of stress, for example an inability to handle the workload and complexity of assignments, not enough training, and the number of hours worked (Kurz, 2003). According to the Swedish work environment authority's (2006) records, causes of work stress include excessive job demands, employees not having enough influence over their own work situation and not enough support from other people (Swedish work environment authority, 2006). Furthermore, with regard to task knowledge and experience:

Having sufficient knowledge and skills for one's task reduces the risk of overstrain, gives security and contributes towards good self-esteem. It is important that the employer investigate the employee's need of knowledge or skills and that these be supplemented where necessary. (Swedish work environment authority, 2006, p.8)

This belief is supported by Griffin and Moorhead (2012) who stress the importance of identifying causes of stress in the workplace in order to try and minimize the negative effects they can have. According to the World Health Organization: "Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope" (World Health Organization, n.d., para. 1).

Research Question

The purpose of the research conducted is to examine whether Icelanders who use English extensively in the workplace experience more stress than those who use English less. Although this research will not answer the question whether those struggling with English communication skills experience more stress than those with fluency, or high proficiency in English, this is an attempt to identify a possible relationship between aspects of work stress and English use in the workplace.

The research question: *Do Icelandic workers who use English in the workplace extensively experience greater stress in the workplace?*

A survey was conducted within several Icelandic companies. Data was gathered from workers on perceived stress in the workplace, perceived English proficiency, and the perceived amount of English used in the workplace. The results from the data cannot be applied to the population, as it does not meet the requirements of external validity. The results could however give insight into future research on the topic.

Methodology

The study is based on quantitative methodology. A questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data from 98 participants (96 valid responses) on their perceived job demands, perceived stress in the workplace, and their perceived English use and proficiency. Independent variables included the amount of English used in the workplace, age, gender, education, hours worked per week; and English proficiency. Dependent variables included perceived stress in the workplace and job demands.

The Survey

The survey consisted of fifteen questions in Icelandic (see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire). The survey's aim was to gather data on the participants' gender, age, level of education; perceived level of English proficiency, amount of English used in the workplace; hours worked per week, perceived job demands and stress in the workplace.

The first five questions of the questionnaire pertaining to job demands were taken from the shorter version of the job demands section in the General Nordic Questionnaire for psychosocial factors in the workplace (QPSNordic). In 2004, Hólmfríður K. Gunnarsdóttir translated the questionnaire into Icelandic and it is available in a shorter version called QPSNordic 34+. The Nordic Council of Ministers commissioned the creation of the QPSNordic, and the goal of the project was to construct a quality questionnaire through which comparable data could be collected (Lindström, Elo, Skogstad, Dallner, Gamberale, Hottinen, Knardahl & Ørhede, 2004). The questions are on a five point Likert scale where the scores range from one (very seldom or never) to five (very often or always). The higher the total score, the more job demands experienced. The subsequent questions in the questionnaire were those of the authors and pertained to perceived work stress, hours worked per week, the amount of English used in the workplace, perceived English proficiency; and three background questions. Respondents were not able to go back and review previous answers on the previous page when participating in the survey.

Sample, data gathering and analyses

A non-randomized, convenience sample was used, and therefore the results yielded by the survey data cannot be considered representative of the population. Twenty-five

Icelandic companies were contacted and asked to participate. Three companies declined participation, four companies agreed, and eighteen did not respond. The data was collected using Google Docs' online survey software. The survey was sent to the companies on the 26th of March, 2014 and was open for eight days. A total of ninety-eight responses were received. The data was imported from Google Docs to Microsoft Excel 2013 where two of the responses were excluded due to the respondents misunderstanding one of the questions. All participants answered all questions. The data was analysed using the statistical program SPSS Statistics 20. Graphs and tables were created using Microsoft Excel 2013.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Significance tests were performed to check for the probability of a statistically significant difference also being present in the population (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). Normally, either 99% certainty ($p(\text{sig}) < .001$) or 95% certainty ($p(\text{sig}) < .005$) is used to determine whether the results from the sample are also present in the population (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength of the linear relationship between normally distributed variables and requires the variables to be on an interval or ratio scale (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). It has a range of +1 through 0 to -1 indicating both the direction and magnitude of a relationship (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). Generally 0 to 0.30 indicating a weak relationship, 0.31-0.60 a moderate relationship and over 0.60 a strong relationship, although this does depend on the data that is being examined (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). Simple linear regression was used to gather information on a possible dependence of a variable on an explanatory variable, i.e. the independent variable (Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

Results

First, the background of the participants will be briefly examined, next the variable on the amount of English used in the workplace, thereafter resulting data on perceived proficiency in English and finally job demands and work stress will conclude the study.

Background

Fifty-two of the respondents were men and forty-four were women. Most of the responses came from individuals in the age group 26-35 or thirty-seven responses. There were no responses from the 16-25 age group and the “66 or over” age group. Age groups 36-45 and 46-55 both had twenty-six respondents and there were seven in the 56-55 age group, Figure 1.

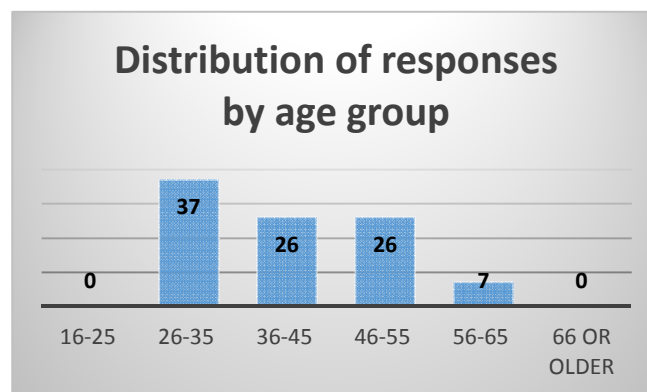


Figure 1: Distribution of responses by age group

Possible replies to the question on education level, “*What is the highest level of education you have completed*”, were divided into: primary education examination (i. grunnskólapróf), retail trade school examination (i. verslunarpróf), matriculation examination (i. stúdentspróf), secondary vocational examination (i. iðnnám), undergraduate/graduate level degree (i. grunnnám á háskólastigi) i.e. a bachelor’s degree or a diploma, and postgraduate level degree (i. framhaldsnám á háskólastigi) i.e. a postgraduate diploma, a master’s degree or a Ph.D. degree. More than half of the participants had completed a university degree; of those, 24% had an undergraduate/graduate level degree and 33% had a postgraduate level degree (Figure 2).

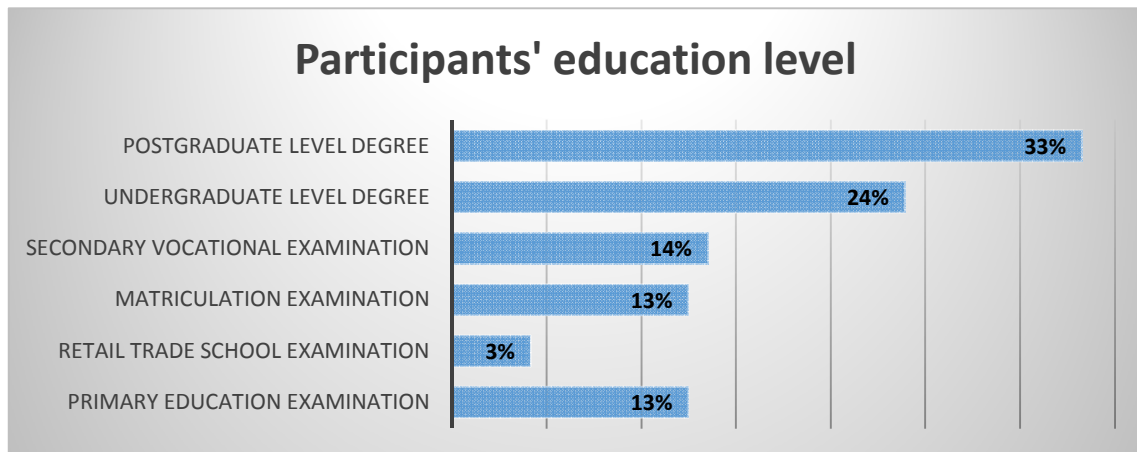


Figure 2: The participants' level of education

The question on hours worked per week on average yielded interesting results. The average hours worked per week was 47.69 hours with a lowest value of 35 hours and a highest value of 70 hours. By dividing the average hours worked per week by the five weekdays it can be assumed that the respondents work 9.54 hours per day on average. There is quite a difference in hours worked by men and hours worked by women. Based on the data women worked 43.43 hours per week on average, or 8.68 hours per day on average while men worked 51.29 hours per week on average, or 10.26 hours per day on average, see Figure 3.

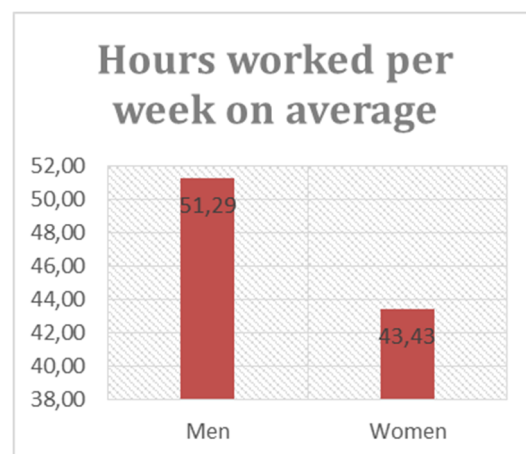


Figure 3: Hours worked per week on average by gender

Amount of English used in the workplace

A descriptive analysis of how often participants use English in the workplace revealed that 29.2% use English "rather seldom" or "very seldom or never" while 51% of the participants believe they use English "rather often" or "very often or always". When the

data is examined with regard to gender, there seems to be quite a difference, see Figure 4 where the division can be observed by gender.

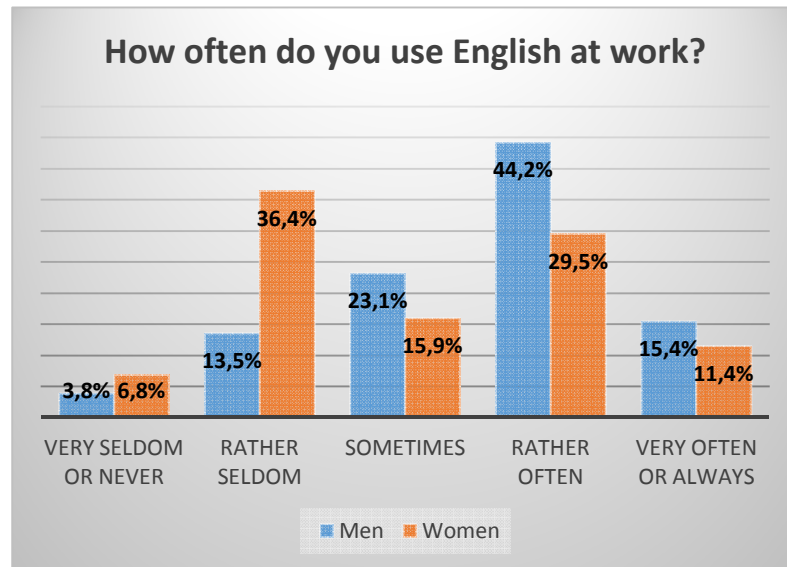


Figure 4: How often the participants use English in the workplace by gender

Using a T-test the variables *gender* and *amount of English used in the workplace* were examined. Participants were asked to select an answer ranging from 1 to 5; 1 point on the Likert scale meaning “*very seldom or never*”, while 5 points means “*very often or always*”. There was a statistically significant difference to the $p < .05$ level. In this study, men were likelier to use English more in the workplace than women. Men had a mean score of 3.54 on the 1-5 point Likert scale compared to the women’s mean of 3.02 ($t=2.267$; $p < .05$).

When the variables *highest education completed* and *amount of English used in the workplace* were examined it was revealed that a quarter of those who had a postgraduate level degree used English in the workplace “*very often or always*” compared to only 8.7% of those with an undergraduate/graduate level degree, see Figure 5.

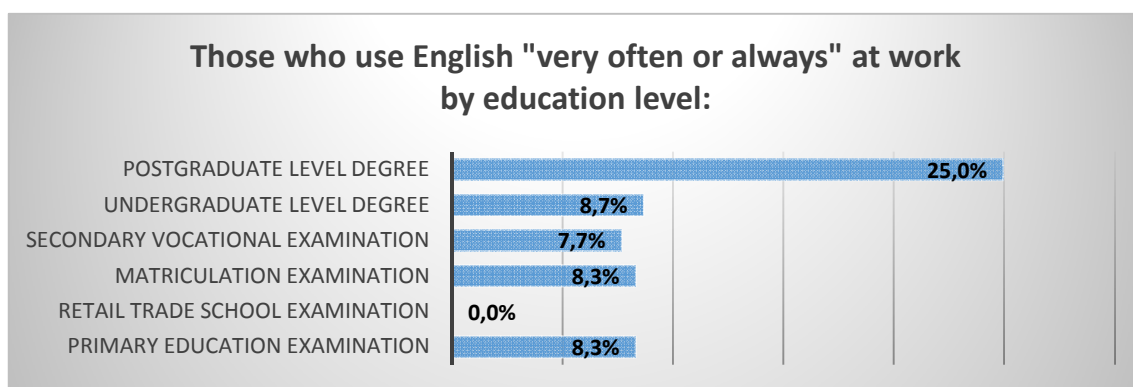


Figure 5: Those who use English "very often or always" in the workplace by education level

Those who use English in the workplace the most were in the age group 36-45, where 42.3% answered "rather often" and 23.1% answered "very often or always". In the 26-35 years age group, 45.9% answered "rather often" and 13.5% "very often or always". The two older age groups appeared to use English much less, in the 46-55 age group 26.9% answered "rather often" and 7.7% answered "very often or always" and in the 56-65 age group 14.3% answered "rather often" and 0% answered "very often or always", see Figure 6. No one younger than 25 or older than 65 answered the survey, so there is no data available on other age groups.

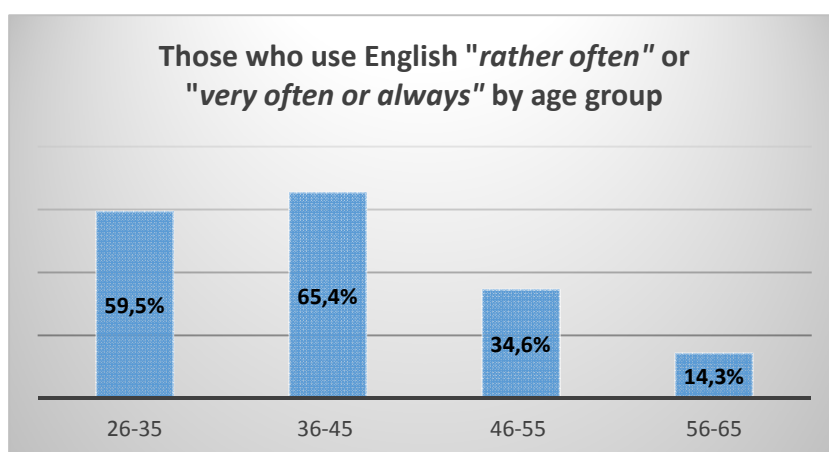


Figure 6: Those who use English "rather often" or "very often or always" by age group

Perceived English proficiency

Four questions on a 5-point Likert scale were used to assess perceived English proficiency. These questions asked participants to assess their understanding of reading, writing, and speaking English, as well as their understanding of spoken English. Participants were asked to select an answer ranging from 1 to 5; 1 point on the Likert

scale meaning a poor level of proficiency, while 5 points means a high level of proficiency.

The participants' perceived proficiency in receptive English skills, i.e. understanding written and spoken English was quite high with means derived from the questions' 5-point Likert scale, both had a mean of 4.05. Productive skills, i.e. writing and speaking English were perceived at a somewhat lower proficiency with a mean of 3.73 in writing and 3.76 in speaking, see Figure 7.

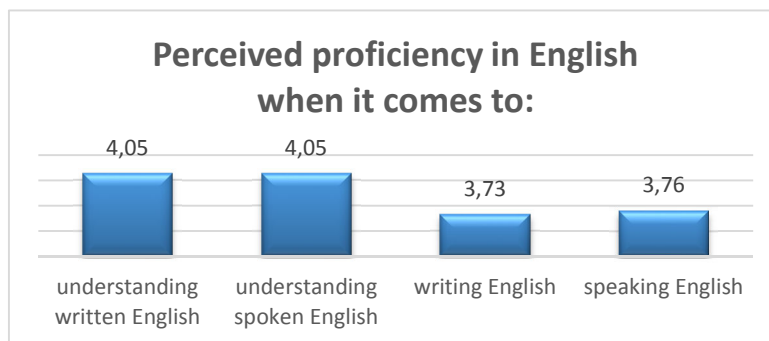


Figure 7: Perceived proficiency in understanding written and spoken English, and writing and speaking English

Men had a slightly higher mean in perceived English proficiency than women in all categories except in the *understanding written English* category, see Figure 8 below where means are derived from the questions' 5-point Likert scale.

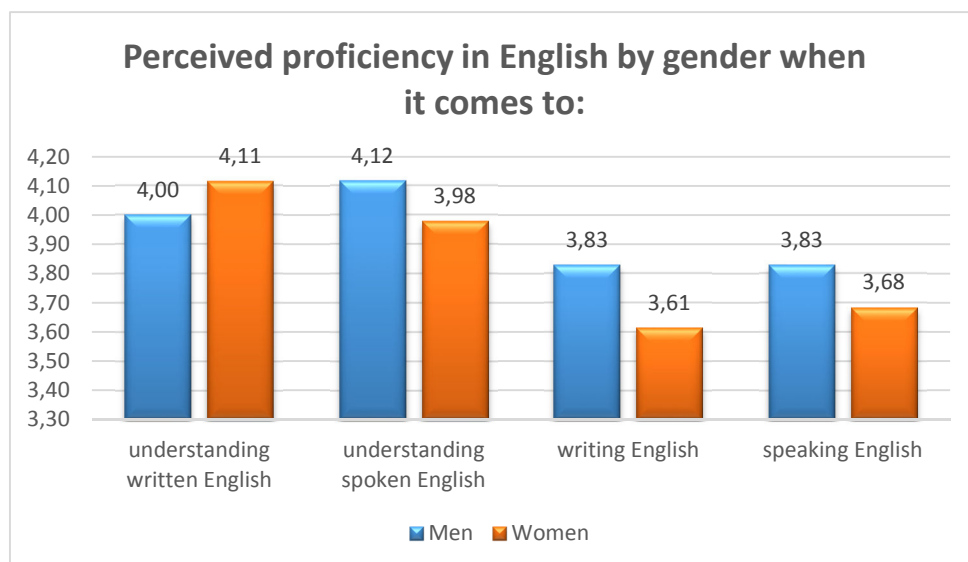


Figure 8: Perceived proficiency in understanding written and spoken English, and writing and speaking English by gender

Derived internal consistency was acceptable with a Cronbach's alpha score of .933 for the four questions and therefore were combined into one variable for the following analyses where overall proficiency is assessed. Generally Cronbach's alpha needs to be 0.70 or higher to be considered reliable, with 0.80 considered good and 0.90 excellent (George & Mallery, 2003).

Crosstabs analysis revealed a difference between age groups with regard to perceived English proficiency. The younger the respondent, the higher the perceived proficiency. Age group 26-35 had the highest mean of 4.22, age group 36-45 had a mean of 4.01, age group 46-55 had a somewhat lower mean of 3.54 and the age group 56-65 had the lowest mean of 3.11 with means derived from the question's 5-point Likert scale, Figure 9.

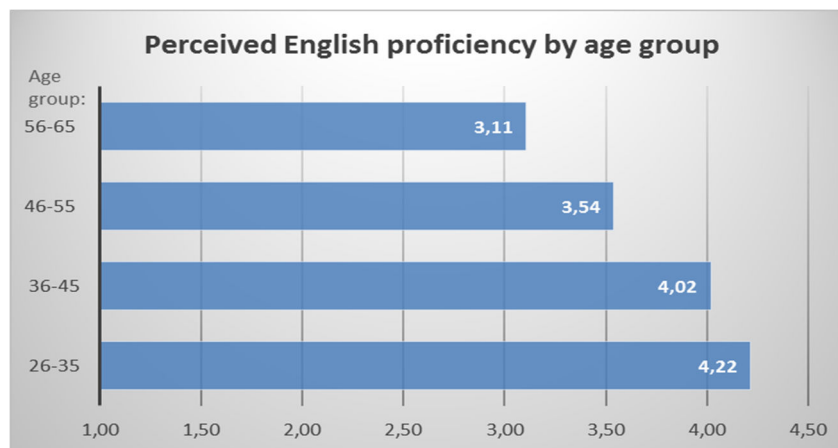


Figure 9: Perceived English proficiency by age group

With regard to education level and perceived English proficiency, those who had completed a postgraduate level degree had the highest mean in perceived English proficiency at 4.43, those who had completed an undergraduate/graduate level degree had a mean of 4.07; those who had completed a secondary vocational examination had a mean of 3.58, those with a retail trade school examination had a mean of 2.75 (only four participants reported completing this type of examination) and those who had completed a primary education examination had a mean of 3.29 in perceived English proficiency, see Figure 10 where means are derived from the question's 5-point Likert scale.

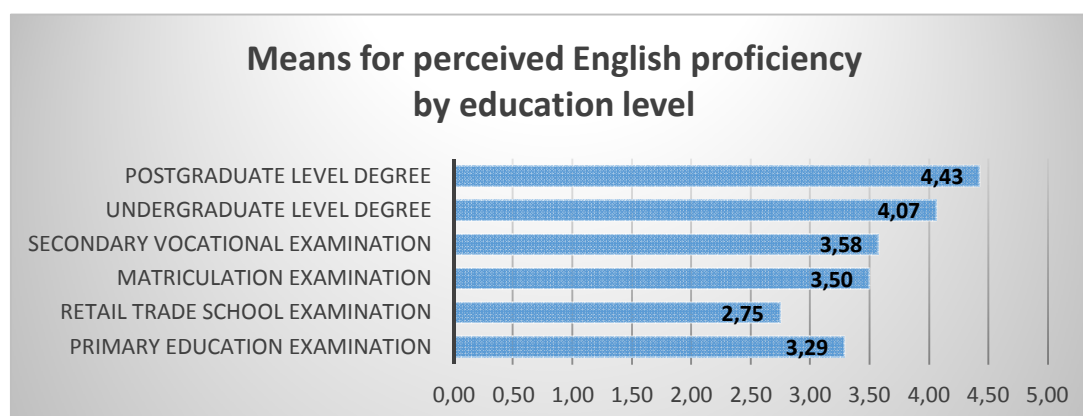


Figure 10: Means for perceived English proficiency by participants' education level

When the variables *amount of English used in the workplace* and *perceived English proficiency* were examined using Pearson's correlation, a correlation of .35 was detected between the variables, significant to $p < .01$.

Stress in the workplace

The five questions on job demands from QPSNordic used in the questionnaire are: Is your workload irregular so that the work piles up? Is it necessary to work at a rapid pace? Are your work tasks too difficult for you? Do you perform work tasks for which you need more training? Do you have too much to do? All with five answer choices: (1) *very seldom or never*, (2) *rather seldom*, (3) *sometimes*, (4) *rather often*, (5) *very often or always* (QPSNordic General Questionnaire for Psychological and Social Factors in the workplace, n.d.). Descriptive results indicate that a large portion of the participants experience high job demands. To the first question, on whether their workload is irregular so that the work piles up, 85.3% answered "*sometimes*", "*rather often*" or "*very often*" and thereof 46.8% answered "*rather often*" or "*very often*". Over 90% answered that it is necessary to work at a rapid pace "*sometimes*", "*rather often*" or "*very often*" and thereof 55.3% answered "*rather often*" or "*very often*". Quite different data came from questions three and four, the third question on whether their work tasks are too difficult for them, 44.8% answering "*sometimes*" or "*rather often*" and no one answering "*very often*", only 7.3% answered "*rather often*". The fourth question on whether they perform work tasks for which they need more training, 63.5% answered "*sometimes*", "*rather often*" or "*very often*" and thereof only 15.6% answered "*rather often*" or "*very often*". Then in the fifth and final question on job demands, 85.4% answered

"sometimes", "rather often" or "very often" and thereof 45.8% answered "rather often" or "very often" on whether they have too much to do. Mean scores derived from the questions' 5-point Likert scale can be seen in Figure 11.

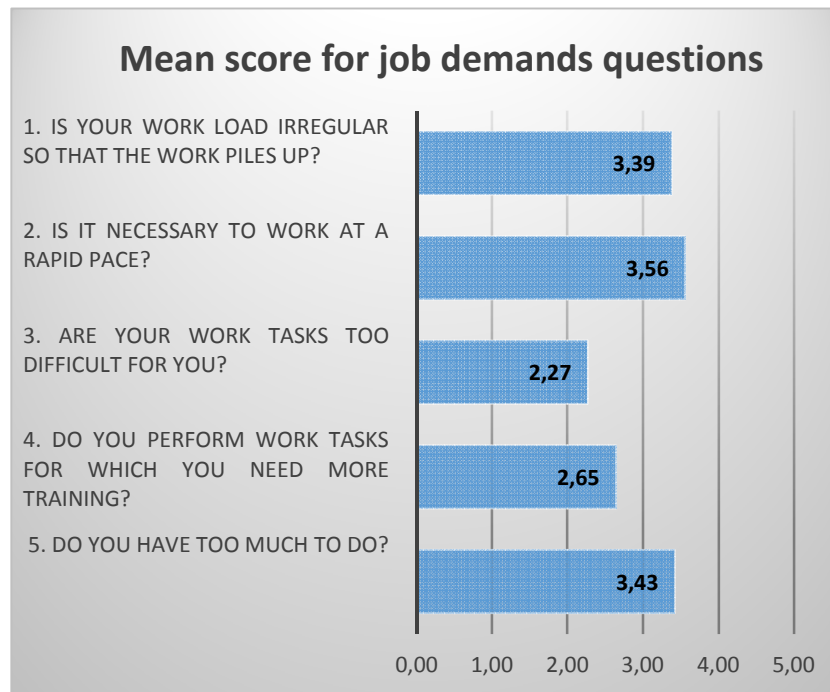


Figure 11: Mean score for the five job demands questions

The five job demands questions had an acceptable level of internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha score of .818 and were therefore combined into one variable for the following analyses. By using descriptive statistics the difference in perceived job demands between age groups is examined using the means derived from the 1-5 point Likert scale. When the age groups and perceived job demands were examined together it was revealed that the age group 56-65 had the lowest mean of 2.54 and the age group 46-55 had the highest mean of 3.23.

When the variables job demands and education level were examined it was revealed that those who have completed primary education examination had the lowest mean of 2.80 and those who had completed a postgraduate level degree had the highest mean of 3.24. A significant difference was not detected between men and women when it came to job demands. When the variable hours worked per week on average was examined, a weak Pearson correlation with job demands of .2, significant to $p < .05$, was detected.

Perceived job demands and *perceived amount of English used in the workplace* are in positive correlation at .36, significant to $p < .01$. Because the results are statistically significant, a linear regression for the independent variable *amount of English used in the workplace* and the dependent variable *perceived job demands* was performed. The results revealed an adjusted R^2 value of 12.2%, which reports how much the amount of English used in the workplace accounts for perceived job demands, ($\beta = .362$, $t = 3.762$, $p > .05$). It can be speculated based on the findings that the amount of English used in the workplace could be a factor in perceived job demands.

Next, the results from question six on work stress will be examined: How often do you experience stress in the workplace? With the following answer choices: (1) *very seldom or never*, (2) *rather seldom*, (3) *sometimes*, (4) *rather often*, (5) *very often or always*. Descriptive analysis show that 64.6% the participants experience stress in the workplace “*sometimes*”, “*rather often*” or “*very often*”, thereof 37.5% answered “*rather often*” or “*very often*”, Figure 12 where means are derived from the question’s 5-point Likert scale. By using descriptive statistics, the difference in perceived work stress

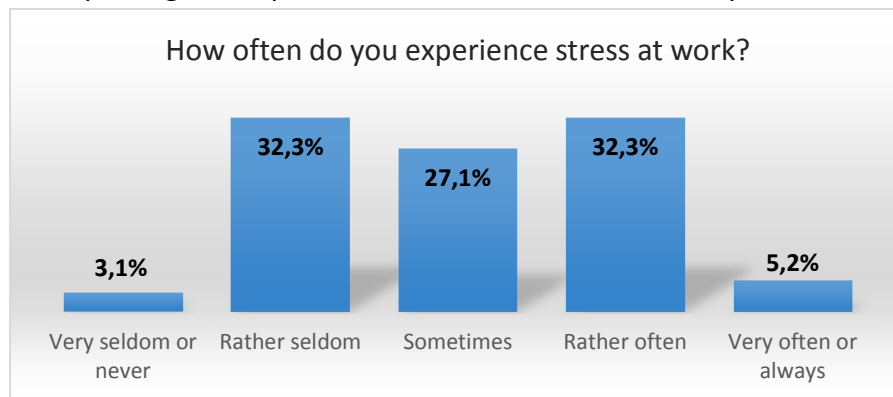


Figure 12: How often the participants experience stress in the workplace

between age groups is examined using the means derived from the 1-5 point Likert scale. Age group 56-65 had the lowest mean and the age group 46-55 had the highest mean showing similar results as with job demands. When the variables work stress and level of education were examined it was revealed that those who have completed a matriculation examination had the lowest mean of 2.58 and those who had completed a postgraduate level degree had the highest mean of 3.19. No significant difference was detected between men and women when it came to work stress. When the variable hours worked per week on average was examined, a correlation with stress in the workplace was not detected, interestingly enough. A Pearson correlation was carried

out to compare the relationship of perceived stress in the workplace and the amount of English used in the workplace and there was a positive correlation of .39, significant to $p < .01$. The results indicate that perceived job stress is in correlation with the amount of English used in the workplace. A linear regression run for the independent variable *amount of English used in the workplace* and the dependent variable *perceived job stress* revealed an adjusted R^2 value of 14.3%, which reports how much the amount of English used in the workplace accounts for perceived work stress, i.e. of the variance in work stress, ($\beta = .390$, $t = 4.109$, $p > .05$). The analyses that have been demonstrated in these results will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Discussion

In the following chapter, there will be a discussion of the survey results. First, the difference between men and women will be discussed. Next, perceived English proficiency and amount of English used in the workplace, and then English use in relation to job demands and work stress. Thereafter, some of the limitations of the study are outlined, and finally a discussion on possible future research.

Differences according to gender

According to the survey's data, men were considerably more likely to use English in the workplace than women. While a gender difference was anticipated in the survey regarding the amount of English used in the workplace, the results of a preponderance of men using English in the workplace was unexpected. Men also perceived their English proficiency to be slightly higher than women did. Among the participants, fewer men had a university education than women did, i.e. 61.3% of female participants had completed a university degree compared to 53.8% of the male participants. There was also a substantial gender difference regarding to the average number of hours worked per week. According to the data, women worked 43.4 hours per week on average while men worked 51.3 hours per week on average. According to Statistics Iceland's labour market statistics for the 3rd quarter of 2013, women worked 42.7 hours per week on average while men worked 48 hours per week on average (Statistics Iceland, 2013). The survey results are consistent for women's hours worked and Statistics Iceland's data. However, there is disparity between the men's results of the survey and Statistics Iceland's results. Possible explanations for this disparity are that male participants of the survey happened to work more hours per week on average, or that they overestimated hours worked per week. An insignificant difference was detected between men and women when it came to perceived job demands and work stress.

Perceived English proficiency and amount of English used in the workplace

The participants of the survey perceived their receptive English skills significantly higher than their productive skills which is consistent with previous studies that suggest that Icelanders have more receptive English proficiency than productive English proficiency. There seems to be more emphasis on teaching receptive English skills in schools in Iceland and research suggests that much more focus should be on furthering learner's productive English skills. The findings of Anna Jeeves's study "suggest a need for advanced language accuracy and fluency in employment" (Anna Jeeves, 2012, p.1).

Moderate correlation was detected between the variables *amount of English used in the workplace* and *perceived English proficiency*, i.e. those who perceived their English proficiency to be high were likelier to use English more in the workplace. More than moderate correlation was expected between these two variables. This highlights a potential corporate deficiency during the applicant screening process. Perhaps there could be benefit in having more stringent interview questions and testing of applicants English proficiencies for positions that require English to be used extensively.

English use in relation to work stress

Next, the subject of the research question will be addressed: *Do Icelandic workers who use English in the workplace extensively experience greater stress in the workplace?* The research data does suggest that those who use English more in the workplace are more likely to experience greater stress in the workplace. The analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between the variables *amount of English used in the workplace* and *work stress*. A positive relationship was detected revealing that those who use English extensively in the workplace are more likely to experience greater stress in the workplace. More specifically, a linear regression showed that English use in the workplace accounts for 14.3% of the perceived work stress variable. That is, English use in the workplace accounts for 14.3% of all elements that contribute to workplace stress for the survey's respondents. However, correlation does not necessarily indicate causation. The relationship could be attributed to factors other than work stress. Those who use English in the workplace more than others could be more likely to hold the type of job position that results in more stress, perhaps having more responsibility than others. As discussed previously, the data showed that those participants who have a

postgraduate level degree are most likely to use English frequently in the workplace and the author speculates that those who have higher education might hold a higher-ranking position with more responsibilities and therefore experience more work stress. However, these are only speculations made by the study's author and would require additional research to validate. While the data was gathered using a non-randomized convenience sample, the results are nevertheless interesting and call for further research on the effect of using a foreign language in the workplace.

Conclusions

There are numerous limitations to this study. Due to methods used in collecting the data, the results cannot be applied to the larger population. The data was collected using a non-randomized, convenience sample. The results of the analyses only apply to the participants' answers. The results are nevertheless fascinating and hopefully will inspire more research on the topic. Future research needs to have external and internal validity. Ideally, the sample should be random and satisfactorily represent the characteristics of the population. With regard to internal validity, the questionnaire used in this study did not include a comprehensive measurement of perceived job stress, work stress, English use and proficiency. The questions need to be measurable; chosen in accordance with that which is being examined and the type of analyses that will be performed. The author made a conscious decision to keep the survey short with the aim of receiving enough responses, around 100 responses, to be able to run the required analyses. The sample size should be larger than fifty participants in order to calculate correlation (VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007). Furthermore, the order of the questions in a survey can be very important and generally difficult and/or sensitive questions should come later on in a questionnaire (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). In this survey however, questions of a more difficult or sensitive nature came first, i.e. the ones on perceived work stress, despite potential limitations. The author chose to put the survey questions in this order for a specific reason. If the questions on English use in the workplace had preceded the questions on work stress the respondents might have realised the survey's purpose of examining stress in the workplace in relation to English use in the workplace. The goal however was to assess the respondents' general perceived level of stress in the workplace.

Additional research may be beneficial to understanding the effects of using English in the workplace. This additional research might benefit companies experiencing the growing trend of English use in Icelandic companies. Work stress is more likely to occur when individuals do not meet the necessary job requirements. If in fact future research reveals that English use in the workplace for Icelanders is one of the causes of work stress, then intervention may be required. Potential solutions to English-induced workplace stress might include improving Icelandic's English formal education to meet the requirements of the job market. Companies who rely on their workers' high proficiency in English might significantly benefit from improving their worker's English proficiency where necessary by offering English language development courses. Alternatively they may want to place greater focus on hiring employees whose English already match the desired level of proficiency. One possible way to determine appropriate levels of proficiency is to test a prospective employee's English competence by using a standardized test to assess workplace English proficiency. These are merely possible options, should future research reveal that English use and workplace stress has a significant impact on the Icelandic workforce.

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Appendix 1

Könnun um kröfur í starfi

Hér á eftir fylgja nokkrar spurningar um núverandi vinnustað þinn:

	Mjög sjaldan eða aldrei	Fremur sjaldan	Stundum	Fremur oft	Mjög oft eða alltaf
1. Er vinnuálagið svo ójafnt að verkefnið hlaðist upp?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Verður þú að vinna á miklum hraða?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Eru verkefni of erfið fyrir þig?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Krefjast verkefni meiri þekkingar en þú hefur?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Hefur þú of mikið að gera?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Hversu oft upplifir þú streitu í starfinu?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Hversu margar klukkustundir vinnur þú að jafnaði á viku? ____

8. Hversu mikið notar þú ensku í starfi þínu?

- ☐ ☐ Mjög lítið eða aldrei
- ☐ ☐ Fremur lítið
- ☐ ☐ Hvorki mikið né lítið
- ☐ ☐ Fremur mikið
- ☐ ☐ Mjög mikið eða alltaf

Hvers mikla telur þú kunnáttu þína vera þegar kemur að því að:

	Mjög litla	Frekar litla	Í meðallagi	Frekar mikla	Mjög mikla
9. Skilja enskan texta	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Skilja talaða ensku	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Skrifa enskan texta	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Tala ensku	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Hvert er kyn þitt?

- ☐ Kona
- ☐ Karl

14. Á hvaða aldursbili ert þú?

- ☐ 16-25 ára
- ☐ 26-35 ára
- ☐ 36-45 ára
- ☐ 46-55 ára
- ☐ 56-65 ára
- ☐ 66 ára eða eldri

15. Hvert er hæsta menntunarstig sem þú hefur lokið?

- ☐ Grunnskólapróf
- ☐ Verslunarpróf
- ☐ Stúdentspróf
- ☐ Iðnnám
- ☐ Grunnnám á háskólastigi
- ☐ Framhaldsnám á háskólastigi