

The cover page features a background with three vertical color bands: orange on the left, light green in the center, and light blue on the right. White curved lines swirl across the bands. In the top left corner is the MRC logo, and in the top right is the CCL logo with the tagline 'The Training Specialists'. The title is centered in blue, bold, sans-serif font. Below the title, the consultant name and date are also centered. At the bottom, a small line of text provides the project name and date.

**MRC**

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The Training Specialists

**ASSESSMENT OF THE USE OF  
ENGLISH IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS  
IN MAURITIUS**

**CCL Management Consultants**

*17 October 2006*

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This page follows the same design as the cover page, with the same background and logos. The title 'Research Team' is centered in a bold, red, sans-serif font. Below it, the Principal Investigator and Administrative Support are listed in blue, bold, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the same project name and date are listed.

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**Research Team**

**Principal Investigator:**  
**Ms Patricia Day-Hookoomsing, Managing  
Director**

**Administrative Support:**  
**Ms Nadine Malherbe Nombro, Administrative  
Manager**  
**Ms Christina Carpen, P/A to the MD**



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## Overall objectives



- **Assess the proficiency in the use of English in international business and export activities in Mauritius**
- **Measure the extent of the gap between the level of proficiency in English shown by Mauritian employees and that required for success in international markets**
- **Make recommendations to improve the level of proficiency in the use of functional English for business purposes**

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## METHODOLOGY



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**The project comprised two main components:**

1. **Desk study and literature review**
2. **Field study of the four groups of stakeholders identified in the desk study**

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**The desk study identified four groups of stakeholders:**

- **the promoters:** Government and other official institutions promoting Mauritius on the international business scene
- **the providers,** that is, the educational and training system in Mauritius
- **the users,** Mauritian firms and organisations needing employees with a high level of proficiency in international English, in particular call centres and other ICT-related activities, and
- **the actors,** Mauritian employees having to use English in the execution of their work.

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**The literature review examined:**

- the official texts concerning the languages in use in Mauritius, e.g. Constitution of Mauritius, Education Ordinances, Censuses and reports
- relevant aspects of theory and application in the teaching of English as a foreign or second language and for special purposes (TEFL, TESOL and ESP)
- situation in other multi-lingual countries

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**The field study comprised four main elements:**

- a questionnaire
- interviews
- focus groups
- observations / 'mystery shopping'.

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**The questionnaire was designed to:**

- cover as wide a spectrum of possible business activities which could be conducted in English
- build up a profile of the personnel using English in the course of their duties (post held, qualification attained, fluency in spoken and written English)
- obtain views on the use of English in Mauritius
- obtain suggestions on how to improve the level of English in Mauritius.



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**The questionnaire :** 23 questions divided into 5 sections

- Questions 1 to 7: Profile of respondent:
- Questions 8 to 11: Language use
- Questions 12 to 17: Profile of Mauritian personnel using English
- Questions 18 and 19: English as a recruitment requirement
- Questions 20 to 23: Use of English in Mauritius



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## The Literature Review

- The official status of English in Mauritius
- English as a global language
- Which English?
- English in the Mauritian education system
- Teaching and learning English in a multi-lingual environment
- The competition in outsourcing and other BPO activities
- The situation in Mauritius

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## The official status of English in Mauritius

- The Constitution of Mauritius
- Orders in Council 1815 to 1845 on use of English in legal proceedings
- The Education Ordinance, 1957
- The Population Census 2000

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## English as a Global Language

In 1898, in reply to a journalist's question on what he considered to be the most decisive factor in modern history, Bismarck observed:

*"the fact that the North Americans speak English".*

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## English as a Global Language

The UNESCO report *Towards Knowledge Societies*, 2005, sees knowledge of English as an essential requirement in **reducing** both the 'digital divide' and the 'knowledge divide'

*"Language: It is a major obstacle to the participation of all to knowledge societies. The emergence of English as the lingua franca of globalization leaves little room for other languages within cyberspace".*

*"Training in the new information and communication techniques requires a high level of education, knowledge of English and the art of navigating in an ocean of information."*

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## English as a Global Language

IBRD/World Bank, *Lifelong Learning in the Global Knowledge Economy: Challenges for Developing Countries*, Directions in Development series, The World Bank, 2003

*“Policymakers in developing countries need to ensure that young people acquire a language with more than just local use, preferably one used internationally.(....) People seeking access to international stores of knowledge through the Internet require, principally, English language skills.”*

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## Which English?

*“The question of norms for localized Englishes continues to be debated, though the tone is becoming more one of realism and less one of codification. Furthermore, the educated non-native varieties are now being increasingly recognised and defended, both on attitudinal and on pedagogical grounds. The national uses of English are being separated from the international uses, and the nativized innovations are now being considered as essential stylistic devices for non-native English literatures. One notices a shift of opinion toward considering such localised varieties different, not necessarily deficient.”*

(Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: the Spread, Functions and Models of Non-native Englishes*, 1990)  
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## Which English?

McCrum (1986) sees a similar dual situation emerging in the business and professional world.

*“Our own view remains comparatively unchanged. English is not about to become a universal lingua franca, as some have suggested; neither is it likely to splinter into a Babel of competing tongues, at least in a world of telefaxes and satellites. The most obvious future for English is at a powerful, standardized, international level co-existing with a localized, non-standard, indigenous level.”*

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## English in the Mauritian education system

The 1947 Nichols Report on Secondary Education in Mauritius

*“I have already referred to the handicap of an insufficient knowledge of colloquial English and the need for a more realistic teaching of the language in the schools. Since Mauritians seem to need the incentive of an examination for study, the General English paper in the Higher Certificate is a welcome innovation. But it must be framed to meet this particular need. I doubt the value of the translation section and should prefer to see more questions on current English. I suggest that the examiners should be asked to give considerable weight to this paper in making their awards and that a candidate who failed to reach a reasonable standard in it should be ineligible*

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## English in the Mauritian education system



### The 1947 Nichols Report on Secondary Education in Mauritius

*“The Mauritian attitude to education is frankly utilitarian: children are sent to school to pass examinations and obtain certificates, for certificates are necessary to secure employment. The idea that a school has other functions than preparing pupils for examinations, such as training them for citizenship or promoting in them an appreciation of goodness, or beauty, is too rarely accepted.” ...*

*“For Mauritian children are industrious and mentally alert. They deserve a better intellectual education; they need an education which has as its supreme end the cultivation of social and moral qualities.”*

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## English in the Mauritian education system



- Meade, 1961, quoted by Ramdoyal (1977)
- Sir Kher Jagatsingh, *The Future in our Hands*, 1979
- The Richard Commission, *Laying the foundations*, 1979
- HRDC Strategic Action Plan, 2004
- NPCC *Competitiveness Foresight: What orientations for Mauritius?*, 2005
- Ministry of Education, *Developing Mauritius into a Knowledge Hub and a Centre of Higher Learning*, 2005
- **MEF Views on Curricular Reforms, 2005**

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## English in the Mauritian education system

Policy statement made by the Singaporean Minister of Education in an interview to the *Straits Times* in 1985:

*“Improving the proficiency in English among our pupils is the most important task. I make no apologies for this emphasis. Singapore is an international city. Our children will require a good knowledge of English if they are going to find work when they leave school. The task of improving English would be especially important from 1987 when it would be the principal language of instruction in all schools. All the pupils would also be using it as first language.”*

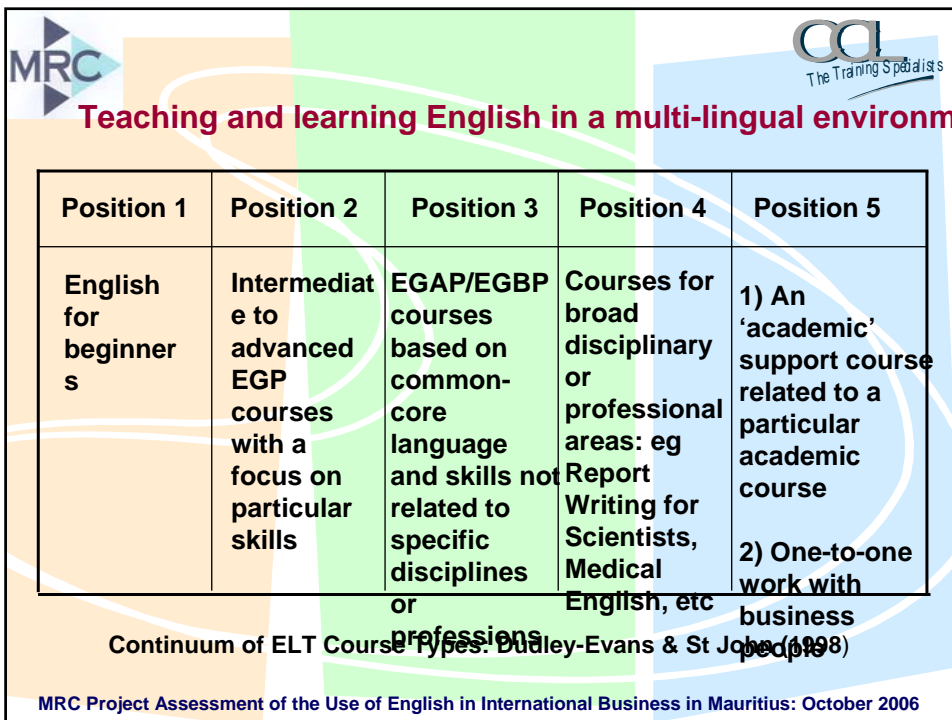
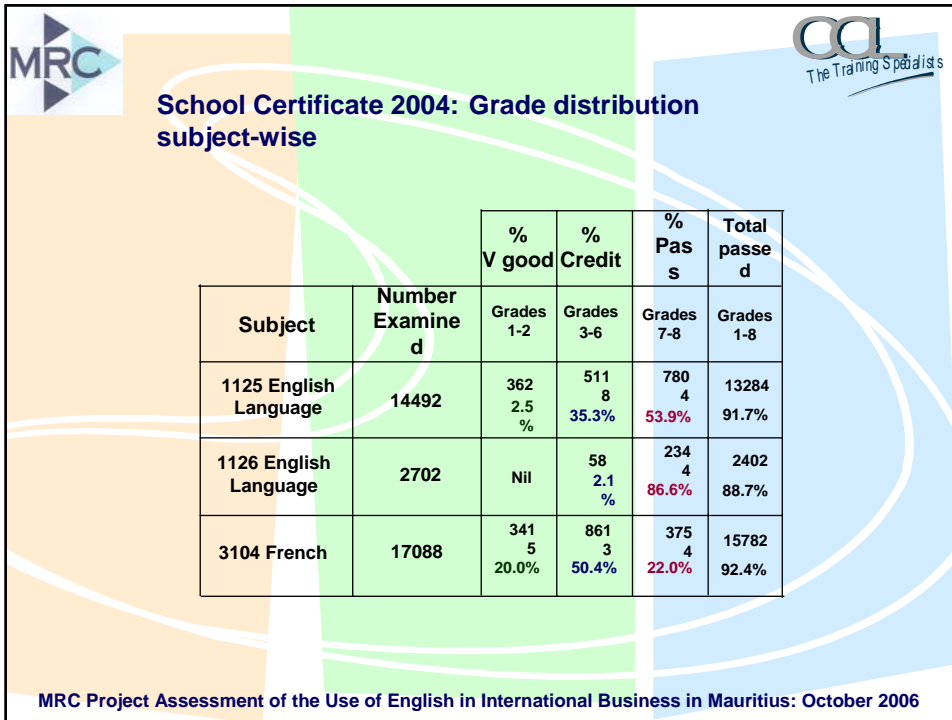
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## Average Performance in English CPE Examinations 1996 - 2004

- 30% candidates fail
- 22% gain mediocre results (grades D and E)
- 25% earn reasonable grades (grades B and C)
- 23% reach the top grade (A)

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## Teaching and learning English in a multi-lingual environment

'The teacher of English has the responsibility of equipping his pupils with the skills they need to pursue their studies in all other subjects either immediately or in the future. This is not to say that English is *'the most important subject on the timetable'* and thereby forfeit the goodwill of our colleagues who teach everything else. But in the hands of a good teacher the English course certainly services every other academic activity in the school and a good many of the extra-curricular ones.

Bright and McGregor *Teaching English as a Second Language* (1970)



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## The competition in outsourcing and other BPO activities

- India
- The Philippines
- Central and Eastern Europe
- Vietnam



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**The competition in outsourcing and other BPO activities**  
**Some basic issues**

- Numbers
- Qualifications
- Cultural affinity
- Work ethic
- Cost

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**The situation in Mauritius**

**The Financial Times Special Report on Mauritius, March 2006**

*Mauritius is touting its good telecommunications infrastructure, educated French- and English-speaking population and a raft of investment incentives as it seeks to draw more international companies to what it sometimes calls “the cyber-island”. ....*



*Others say that the quality of English in Mauritius needs improvement. Many islanders speak it haltingly, even though it is their country’s official language.*

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# FINDINGS From the questionnaire

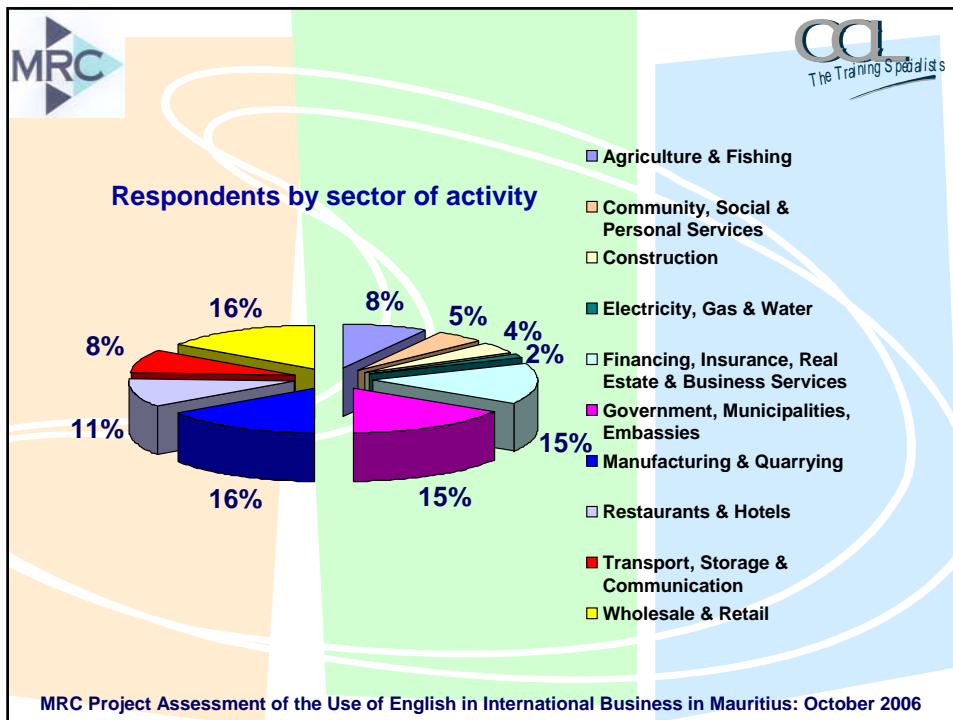
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## Questions 1 to 5: Profile of Respondents

Main sector of activity	Number of respondents
Agriculture & fishing	10
Community, Social & Personal Services	6
Construction	5
Electricity, gas & water	2
Financing, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	18
Government, Municipalities, Embassies	20
Manufacturing & Quarrying	19
Restaurants & Hotels	13
Transport, Storage & Communication	10
Wholesale & Retail	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>

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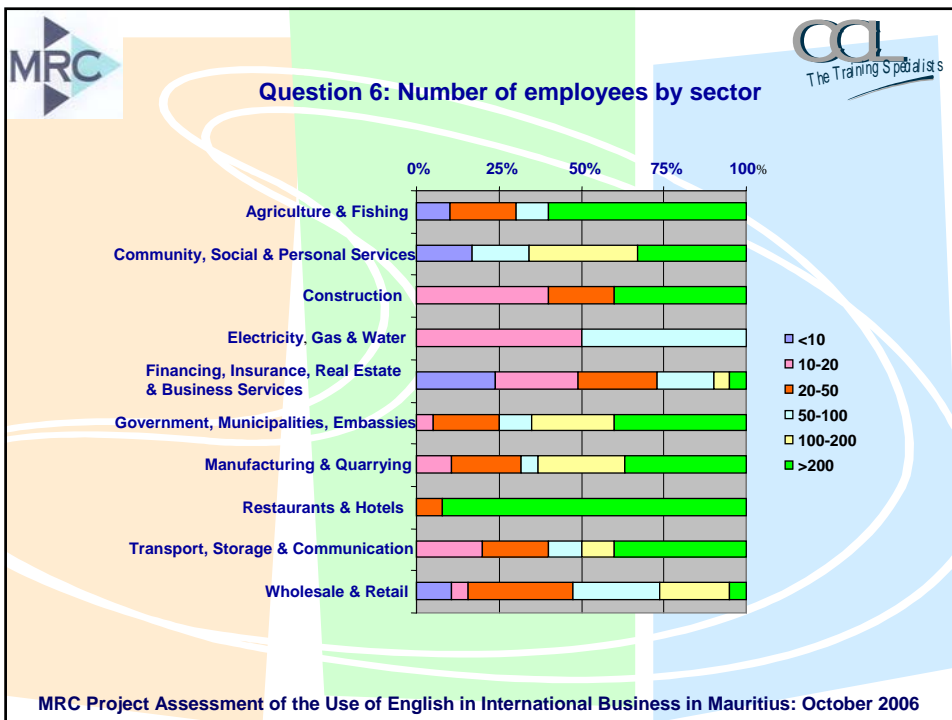
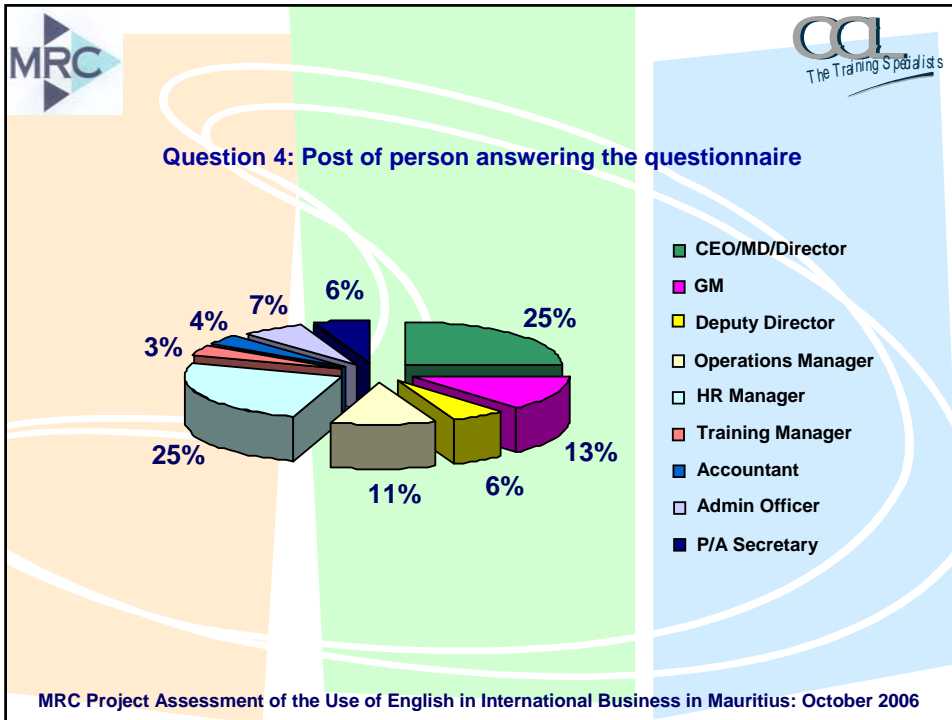


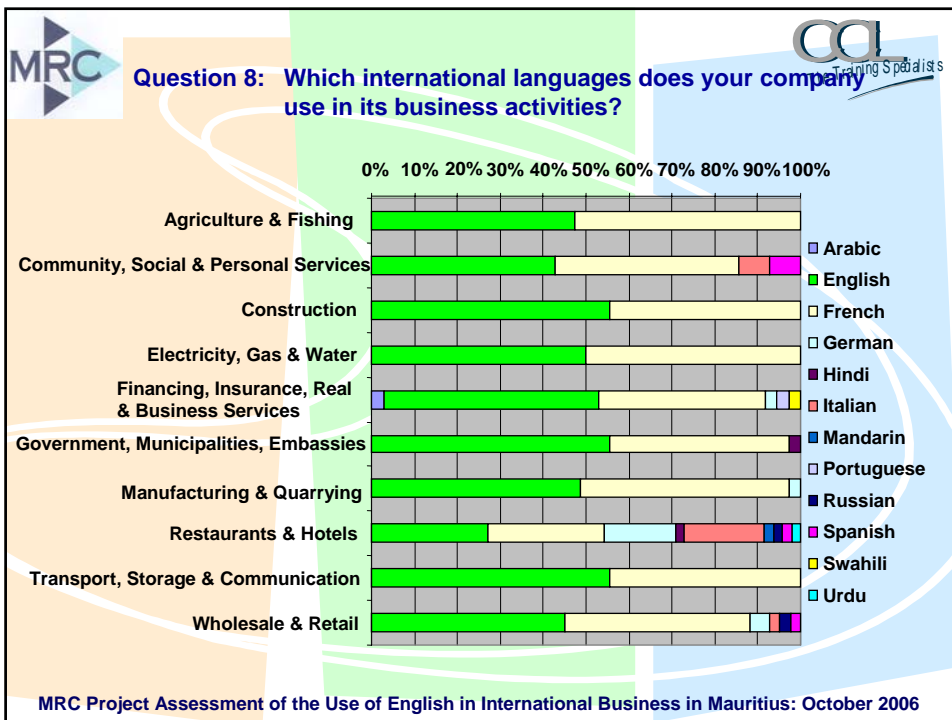
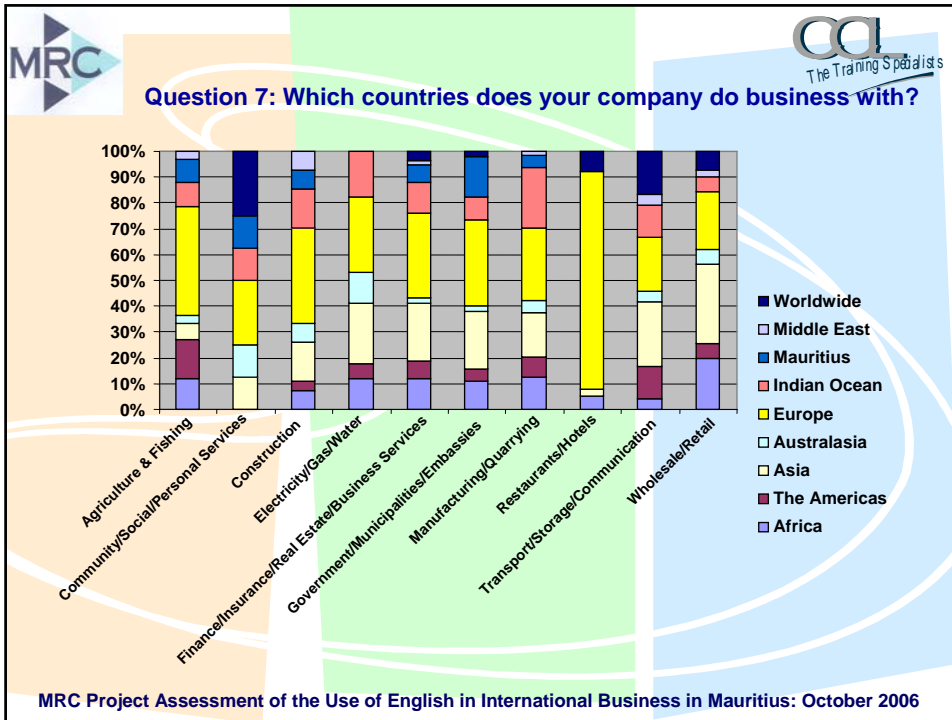
**Question 4: Post of person answering the questionnaire**

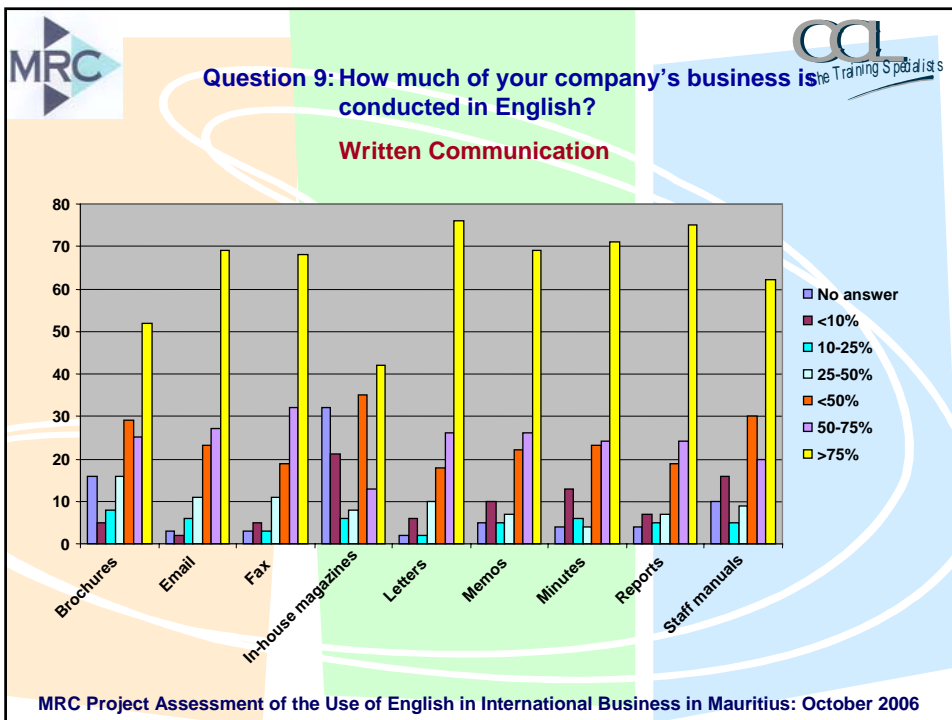
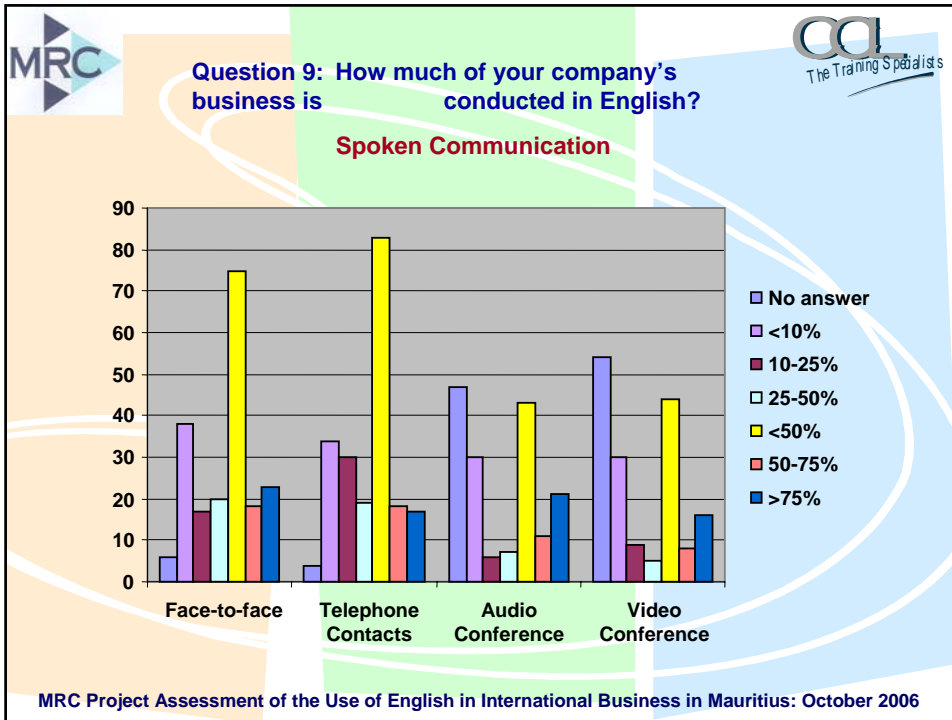
Main sector of activity	CEO/MD/Director	GM	Deputy Director	Operations Manager	HR Manager	Training Manager	Accountant	Admin Officer	PA/A Secretary
Agriculture & Fishing	1	2	0	0	4	1	0	2	0
Community/Social/Personal Services	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Construction	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Electricity/Gas/Water	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finance/Insurance/R Estate/Busi. Services	8	3	0	1	3	1	0	1	1
Government/ Muni./Embassies	1	1	6	4	4	0	0	3	1
Manufacturing / Quarrying	5	3	0	3	4	0	1	2	1
Restaurants/Hotels	0	3	0	0	7	2	1	0	0
Transport/Storage/Communication	0	1	1	1	4	0	1	0	1
Wholesale/Retail	6	2	0	3	5	0	2	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>% of Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>

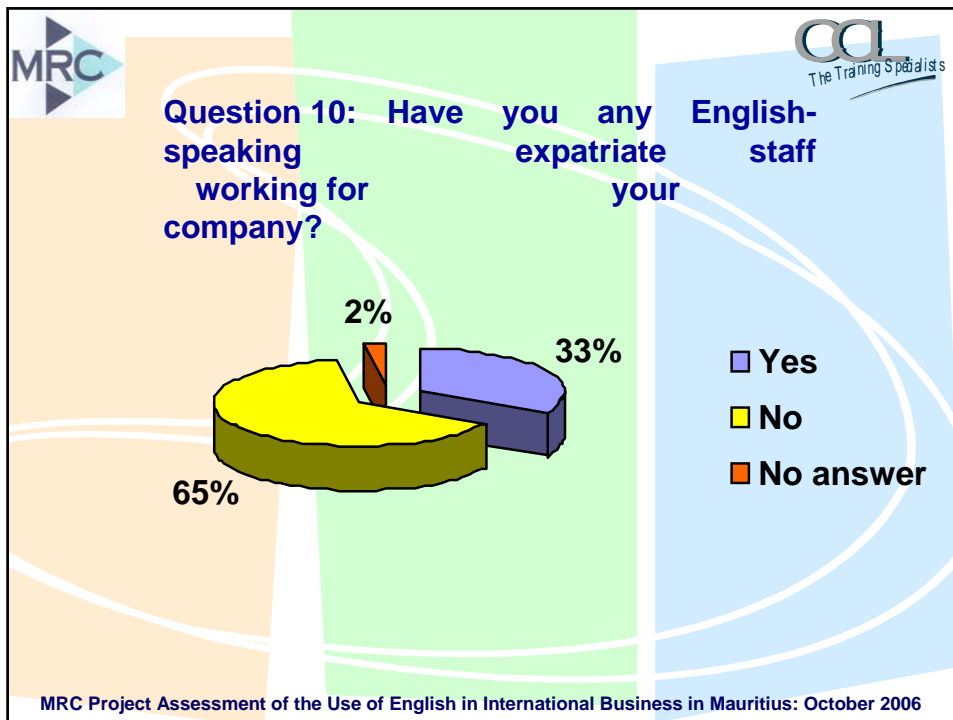
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**Question 11: If yes to Question 10, which post do they hold?**

	Director	Senior Executive	Middle Mgr/Supervisor	Admin/Secretarial	Technician	Other
Agriculture & Fishing	2	1	0	0	0	1
Community/Social/Personal Services	1	0	1	0	0	2
Construction	1	3	2	0	0	0
Electricity/Gas/Water	0	0	0	0	1	0
Finance / Insurance / Real Estate / Business Services	6	8	8	0	0	0
Government/ Municipalities/Embassies	1	2	0	0	33	1
Manufacturing / Quarrying	4	9	3	0	1	0
Restaurants/Hotels	4	7	9	0	0	1
Transport/Storage/Communication	2	5	2	1	1	71
Wholesale/Retail	7	2	6	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>76</b>

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**MRC** **Question 12: How often do your company's personnel use English in their work?** **CCL The Training Specialists**  
 Please rate from 0 to 5 using the scale below.

0 = Never	1 = Not very often	2 = Quite often	3 = Often	4 = Most of the time	5 = Always
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**Table 12.1: Spoken communication : Average rating by post**

Director / Senior Executive	2.7
Operation /Middle Management	2.3
Supervisor	1.5
Administrative / Secretarial	1.8
Telephonists / Receptionists	1.7
Technician	1.2
Customer Contact	1.6
Call Centre	0.8

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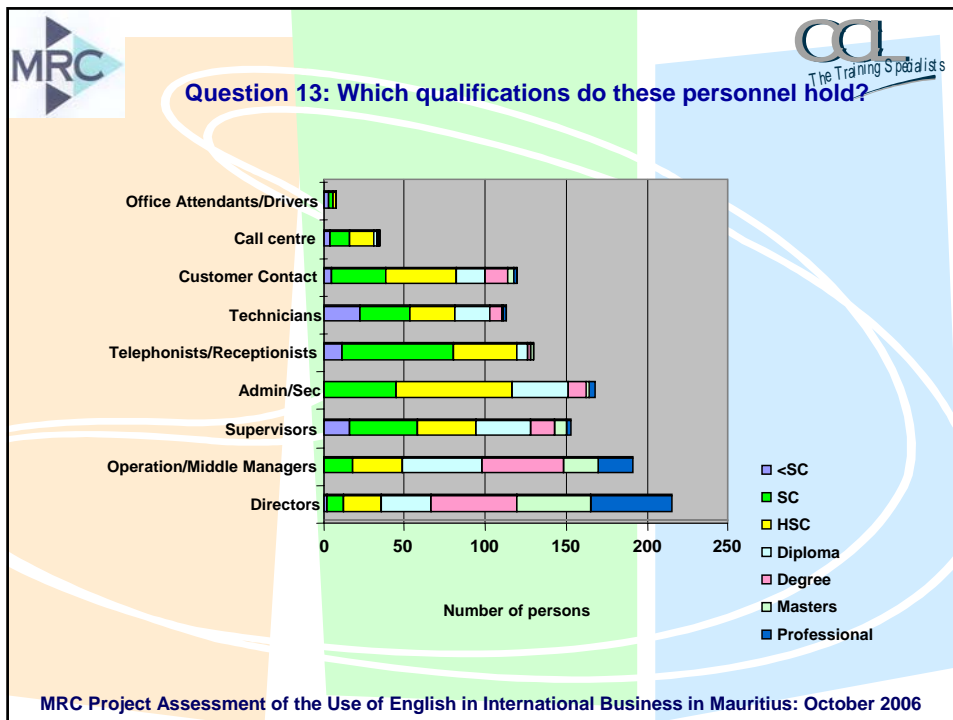
**MRC** **Question 12: How often do your company's personnel use English in their work?** **CCL The Training Specialists**  
 Please rate from 0 to 5 using the scale below.

0 = Never	1 = Not very often	2 = Quite often	3 = Often	4 = Most of the time	5 = Always
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**Table 12.2: Written communication : Average rating by post**

Director / Senior Executive	3.7
Operation /Middle Management	3.4
Supervisor	2.6
Administrative / Secretarial	3.3
Telephonists / Receptionists	2.2
Technician	2.0
Customer Contact	2.3
Call Centre	0.8

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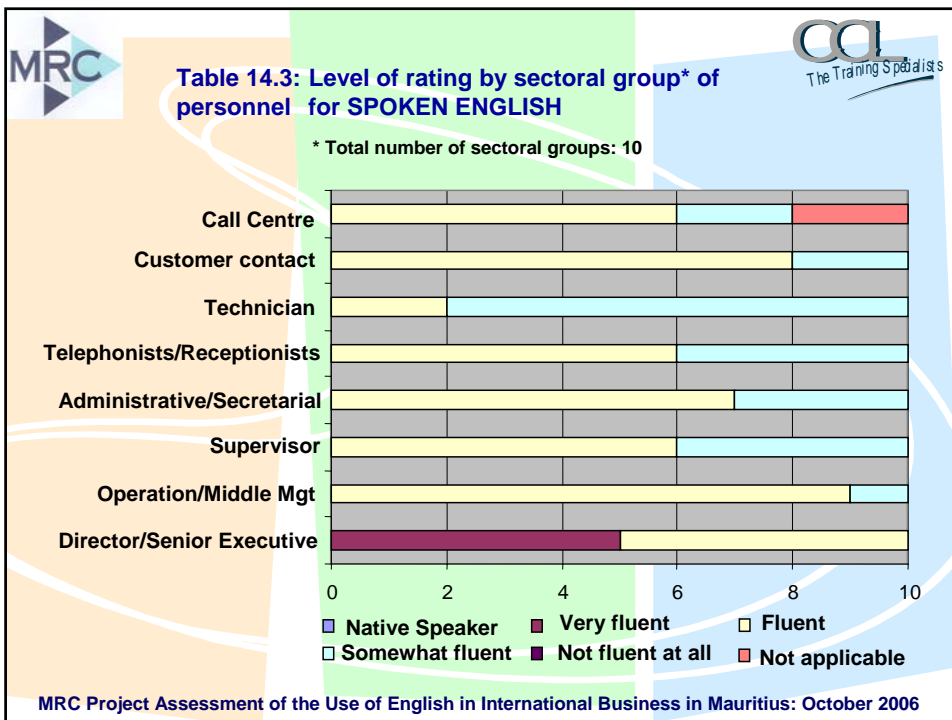
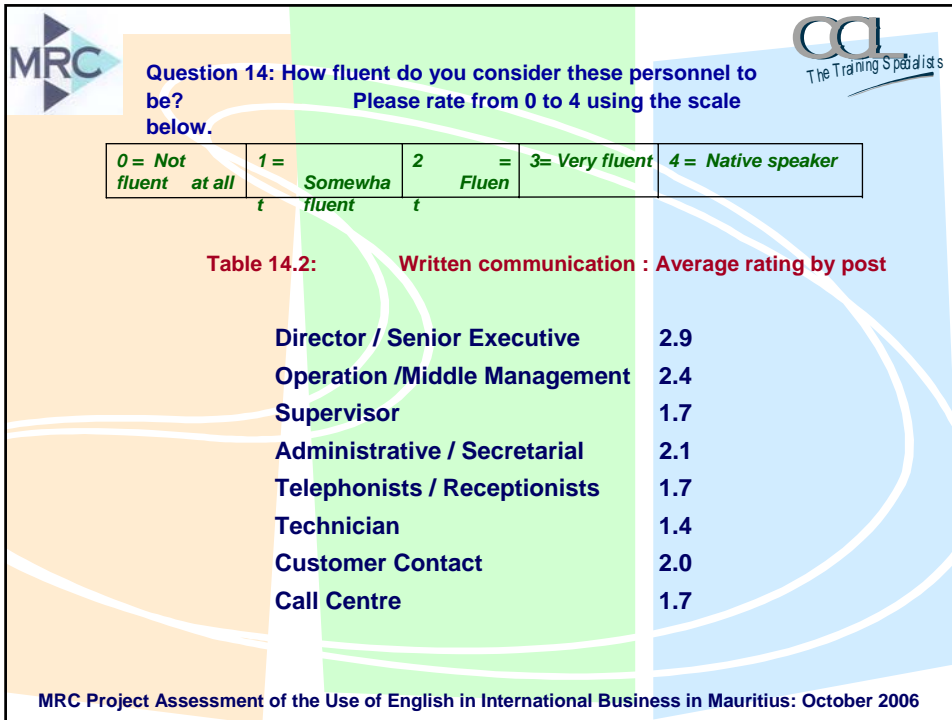
**Question 14: How fluent do you consider these personnel to be?**  
Please rate from 0 to 4 using the scale below.

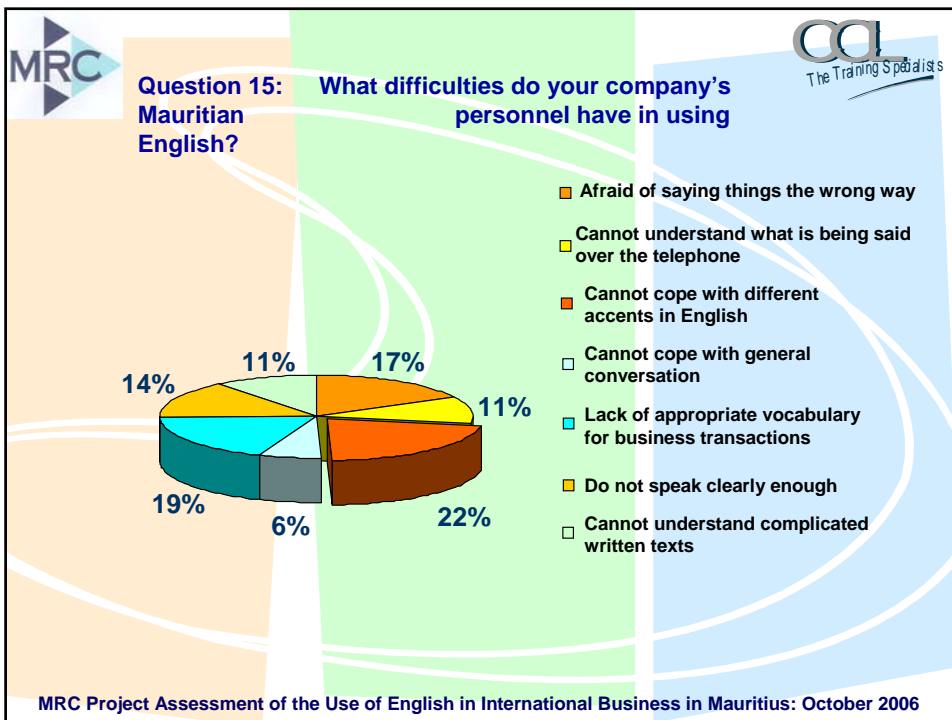
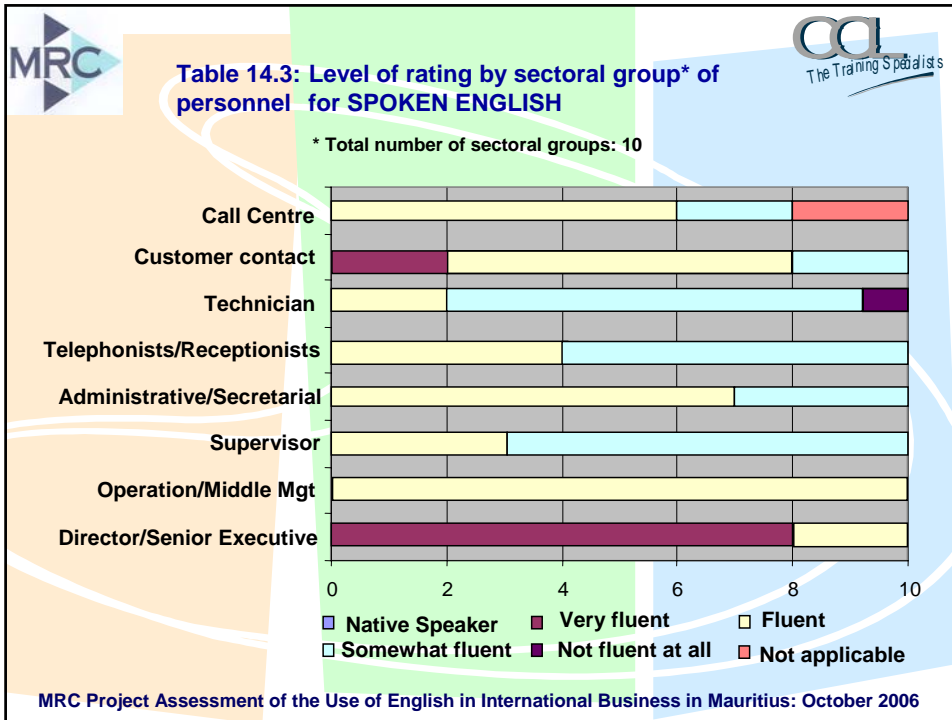
0 = Not fluent at all	1 = Somewhat fluent	2 = Fluently	3 = Very fluent	4 = Native speaker
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**Table 14.1: Spoken communication : Average rating by post**

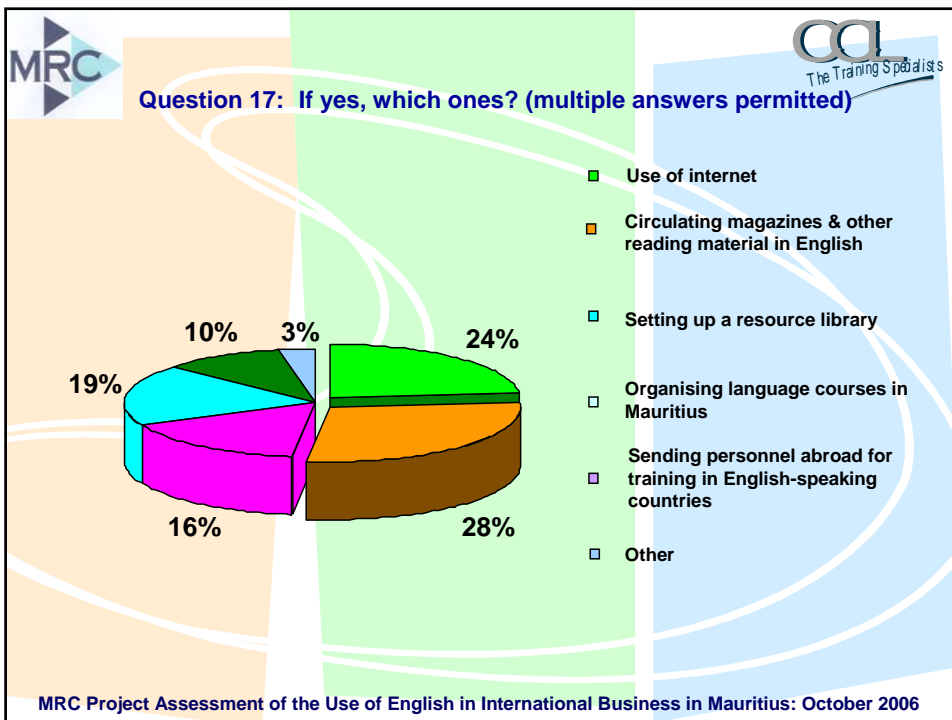
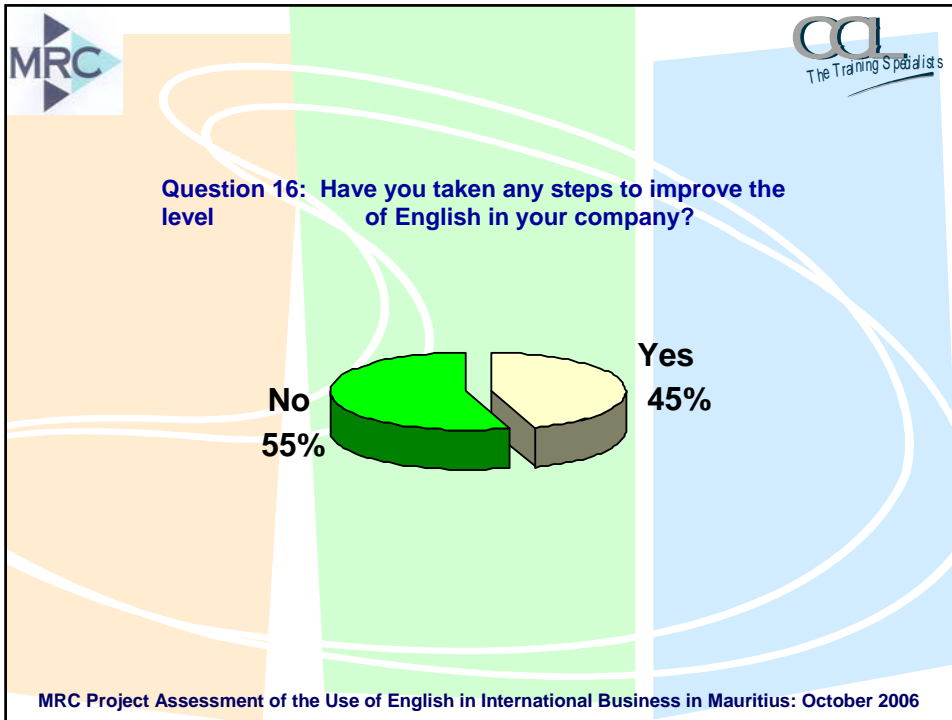
Director / Senior Executive	2.6
Operation /Middle Management	2.2
Supervisor	1.8
Administrative / Secretarial	1.9
Telephonists / Receptionists	1.9
Technician	1.6
Customer Contact	2.1
Call Centre	2.0

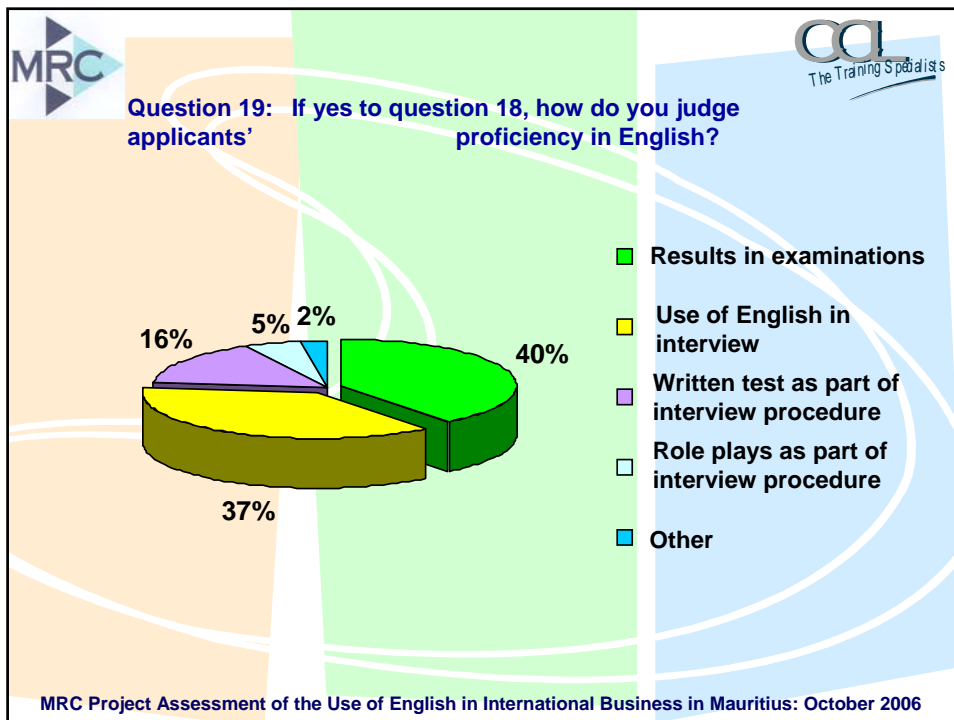
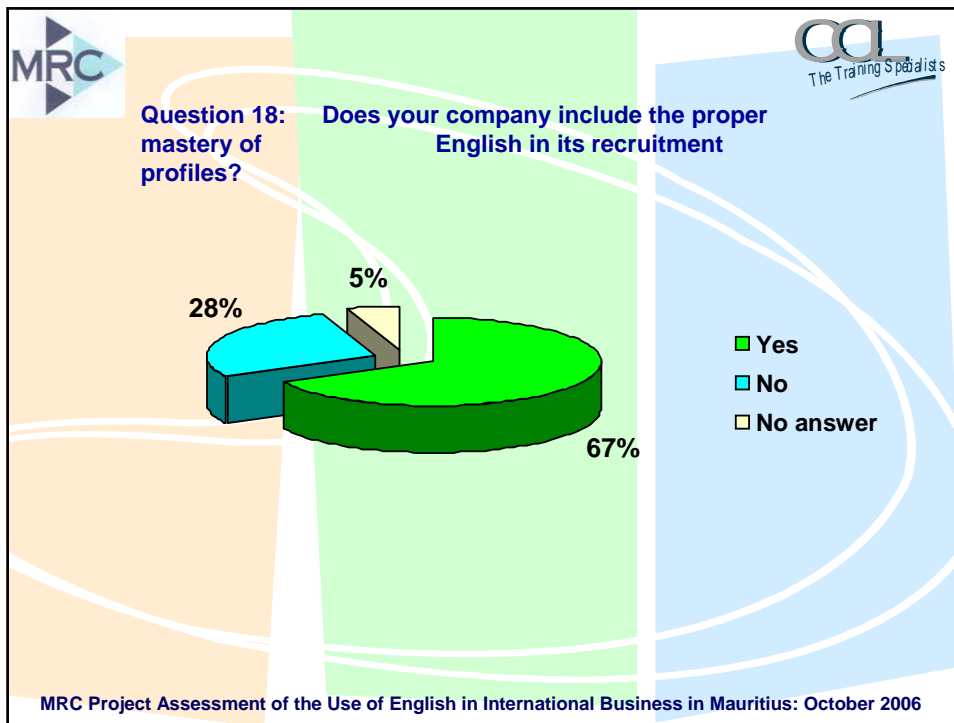
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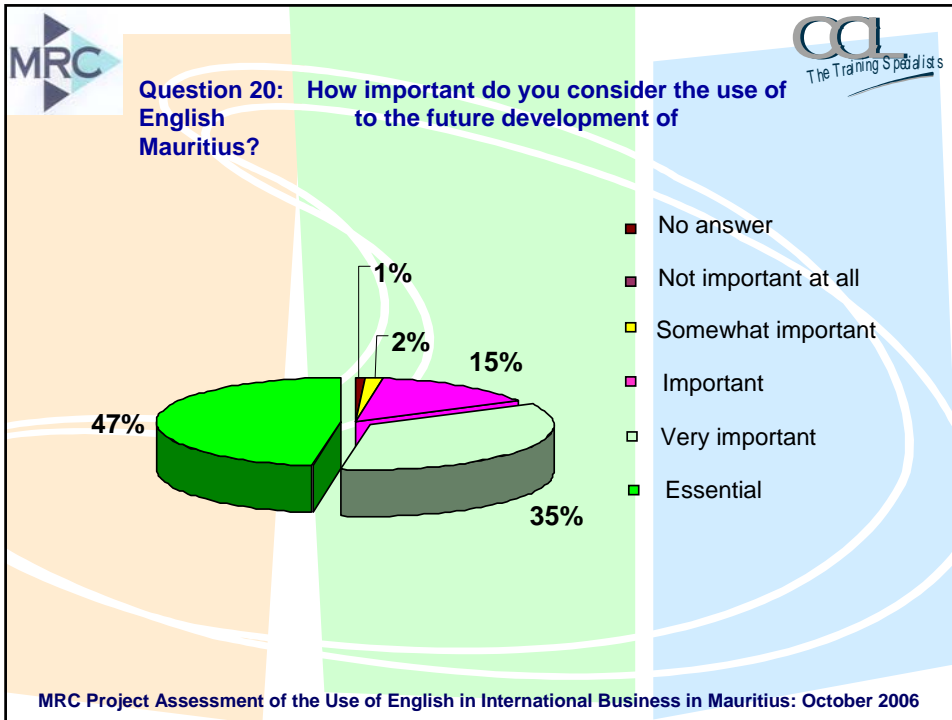












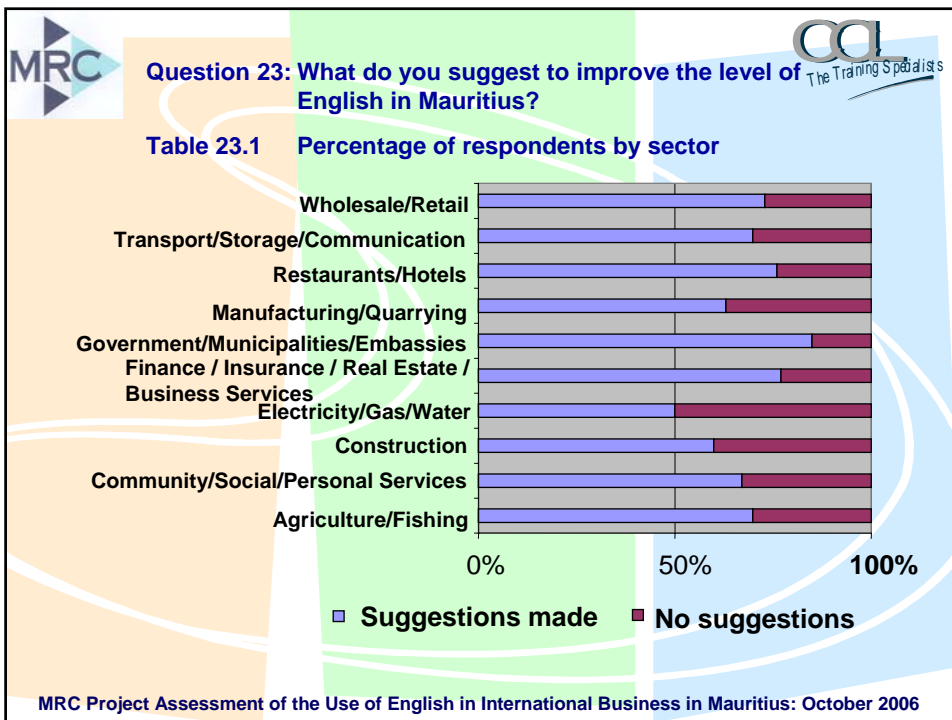
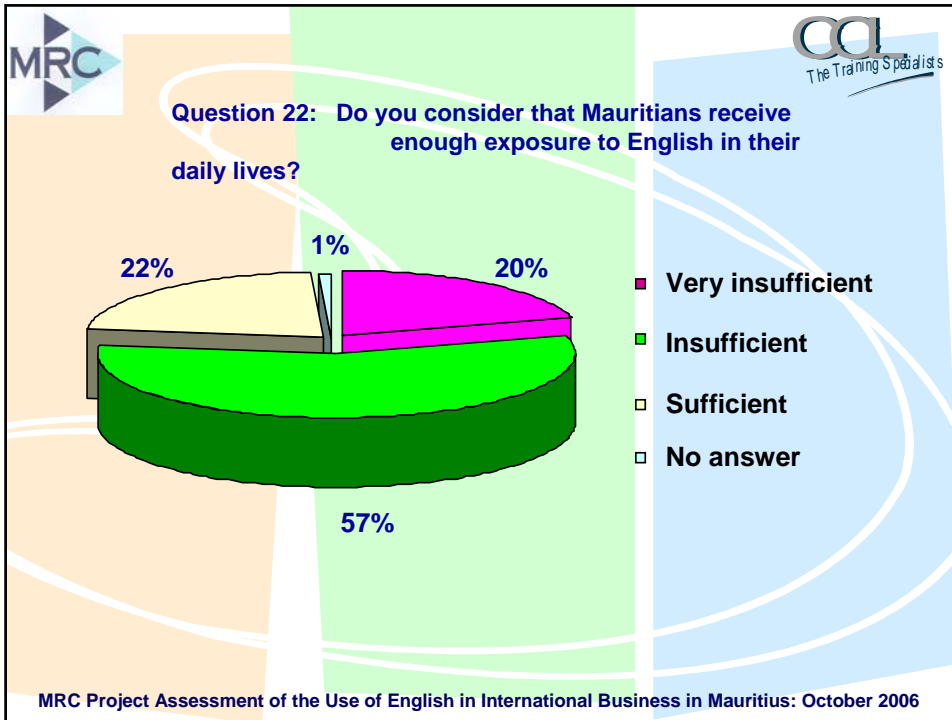
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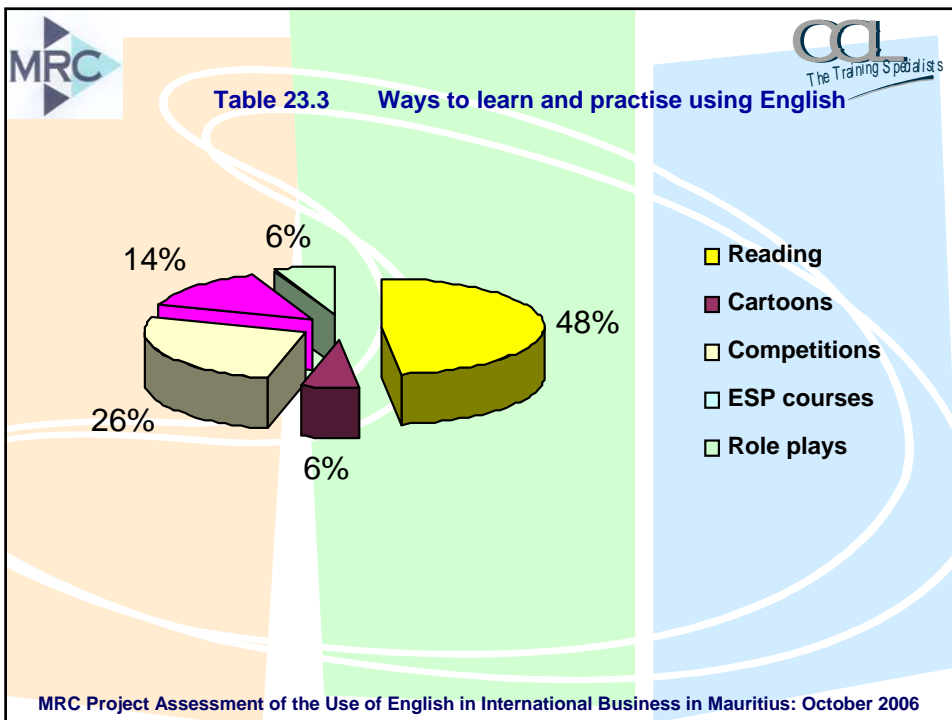
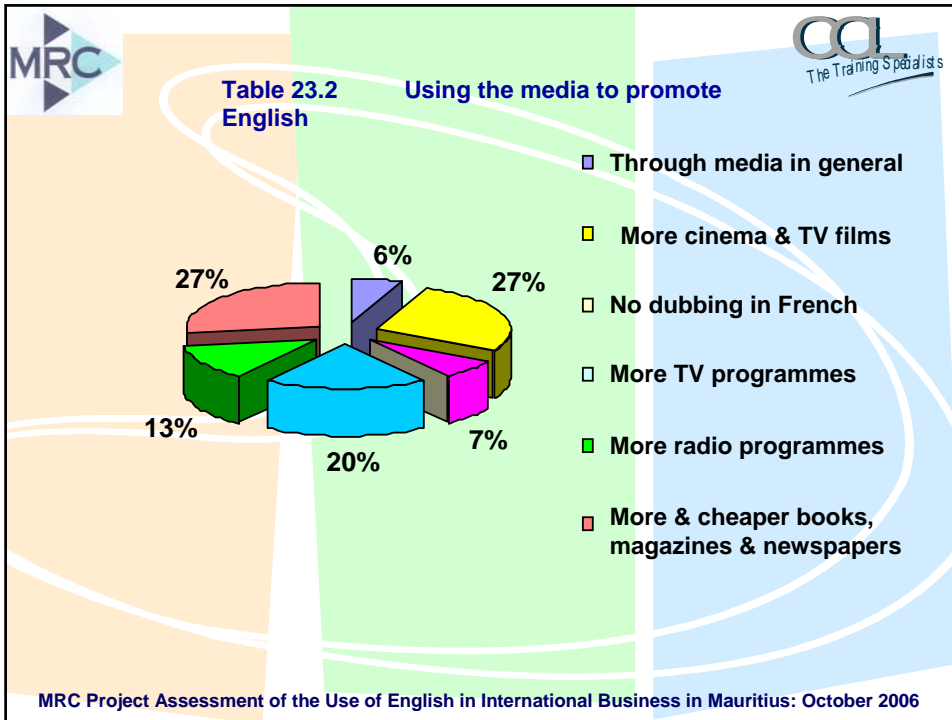
**Question 21: How do you find the level of English used in Mauritius generally? Please rate from 0 to 5 using the scale below.**



0 = Very poor	1 = Poor	2 = Somewhat inadequate	3 = Adequate	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
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Main Sector of Activity	Spoken English	Written English
Agriculture & fishing	2.1	3.2
Community/Social/Personal Services	2.8	3.4
Construction	2.8	3.2
Electricity/Gas/Water	3.5	3.0
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate/Business Services	2.3	3.3
Government/Municipalities/Embassies	2.5	3.4
Manufacturing/Quarrying	2.6	3.0
Restaurants/Hotels	2.7	3.2
Transport/Storage/Communication	2.8	3.0
Wholesale/Retail	2.2	2.6
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>

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## The Interviews

**1. Regulatory and tertiary institutions in the state education system**

- Ministry of Education (Curriculum Development)
- University of Mauritius
- University of Technology
- Mauritius College of the Air
- Mauritius Institute of Education
- Mauritius Examinations Syndicate

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## The Interviews

**2 Private educational institutions**

- DCDM Business School
- Le Bocage International School
- International Preparatory School

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## The Interviews

### The common success factors identified by Le Bocage and IPS Heads of School

1. The educational philosophy of both schools and the consequent focus on the holistic development of the pupils which require interactive teaching methods and not rote-learning
2. The commitment to creating and sustaining an English-speaking environment throughout the school
3. The recruitment of teachers that are native speakers or second-language speakers with a high level of proficiency in English

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## The Interviews

### The common success factors identified by Le Bocage and IPS Heads of School

4. A high level of investment in in-service training both in Mauritius and abroad
5. Constant monitoring of the teaching-learning process by the school management to ensure adherence to the principle of individual accountability by all teachers
6. The insistence on formal lesson planning and setting of learning objectives on a daily and weekly basis within the framework of the main syllabus

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## The Interviews

**The common success factors identified by  
Le Bocage and IPS Heads of School**

7. The emphasis put on encouraging the pupils to undertake creative and research activities as part of their normal studies, thus broadening their linguistic needs
8. Parental support in the learning process

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## The Interviews

**3 Call centres**

**Suggested changes and additions included:**

- a complete overhaul of how languages are taught in Mauritian schools to meet international standards, in particular, English and French
- the introduction of a third European language (German, Italian, Spanish)
- the reintroduction of geography throughout primary and secondary school up to Form V
- courses on European and American culture
- IT skills: key-boarding, word processing, handling data bases
- training in assertiveness and communication skills through activities such as debating societies

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## FINDINGS From the focus groups

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### Table 5.3.1 Focus Groups on Courses at CCL

Business English, Secretarial Skills & Telephonists/Receptionists

Sector	Percentage
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate/Business Services	29%
Government/Municipalities/Embassies	17%
Transport/Storage/Communication	17%
Wholesale/Retail	13%
Restaurants/Hotels	8%
Community/Social/Personal Services	5%
Manufacturing/Quarrying	5%
Electricity/Gas/Water	3%
Construction	3%
Agriculture/Fishing	3%
Other	0%

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## Focus Groups on Courses at CCL

**Questions asked**

- When did they use English in the course of their work and/or at home?
- What difficulties did they experience in using English?
- What suggestions did they have to improve the level of English used in Mauritius?

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## Focus Groups on Courses at CCL

**Answers:**

- All the participants used English at work for official purposes, such as greeting English-speaking visitors, correspondence and formal meetings.
- Those working in offshore business and financial services used more spoken English than the others through daily interaction with the English-speaking expatriate executives based in the Mauritian office.

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## Focus Groups on Courses at CCL

### Answers:

- Only one person working in tourism who had lived in Australia for several years used English regularly at home.
- Some of the others read books and magazines in English
- Nearly everyone preferred to watch English films dubbed in French

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## Focus Groups on Courses at CCL



### Difficulties:

As a result of this lack of sustained exposure, most participants had difficulty in:

- coping with different accents
- finding the right expression to fit the occasion.

Their answers thus corresponded to the findings for Questions 12 and 15 of the questionnaire.

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## Focus Groups on Courses at CCL

### Suggestions for improvement

- More exposure through the media
- Improving the teaching of English in schools
- More emphasis put on training in professional English for adults

Their answers corresponded to the findings for Question 23 of the questionnaire



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## University of Mauritius English Department

1. How would you assess the level of competency in English attained by your students with respect to (a) their academic studies, and (b) their eventual insertion in the labour market as teachers or in other professional fields?
2. Is the English Department involved in TEFL/TESOL/ESP activities? If not, why not?
3. What suggestions do you have to improve the overall level of English used in Mauritius, particularly with respect to the needs of the international business sector?

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**University of Mauritius English Department**

The main problems noted were:

- basic grammar not properly mastered in both oral and written work
- ability to read and retrieve information generally poor
- use of quotes not properly signalled in written work
- lack of willingness to do oral presentations in English
- code-switching from English to French or Kreol in discussions during lectures
- generally passive, non-participative behaviour if lecturer insists on using only English in lectures and discussions



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**Observations / 'Mystery Shopping'**

- Site visit to an established call centre working on the UK market
- Observation of two classes at a English-medium private primary school
- 'Ad hoc' observation when using English to telephone for appointments or on arrival at the reception desk



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## Review of School Text-books

- Out of date
- Examination oriented
- Not wide-ranging enough in content
- Inappropriate cultural bias
- Heavy burden on teachers to find suitable supplementary material

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## MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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The main findings are as follows:

1. The proper mastery of English is essential for organisations in all sectors of the Mauritian economy, with 77% of all business contacts being with English-speaking counterparts
2. The overall level of proficiency is inadequate in all sectors, with only the senior-most executives showing a reasonable degree of fluency in both speaking and writing
3. There is a strong correlation between educational qualifications, post held and proficiency in English, with the highest proficiency being shown by those respondents having tertiary qualifications and holding senior management posts.

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4. The original hypothesis that the problem could be solved by offering targeted training in the specific language requirements of a particular sector has proved to be too narrow. The gap between actual and required proficiency originates in the level of general English attained during normal schooling.
5. The expectations concerning employable language skills are not being met by the Mauritian education system.
6. However, the employers do not seem to be willing to bridge the gap, at least in the short term, to meet the challenges of entering the global market.

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7. From the training perspective, it is very difficult to achieve adequate linguistic competency in a specialist field if the generic language skills are lacking.
8. Another major problem is the general lack of exposure to English in everyday activities. English in Mauritius would seem to have got trapped in a narrow functional and static role that does not correspond to the dynamic needs of international business.
9. The role of the media in the lack of general exposure to English, particularly television and cinema, must be underlined.

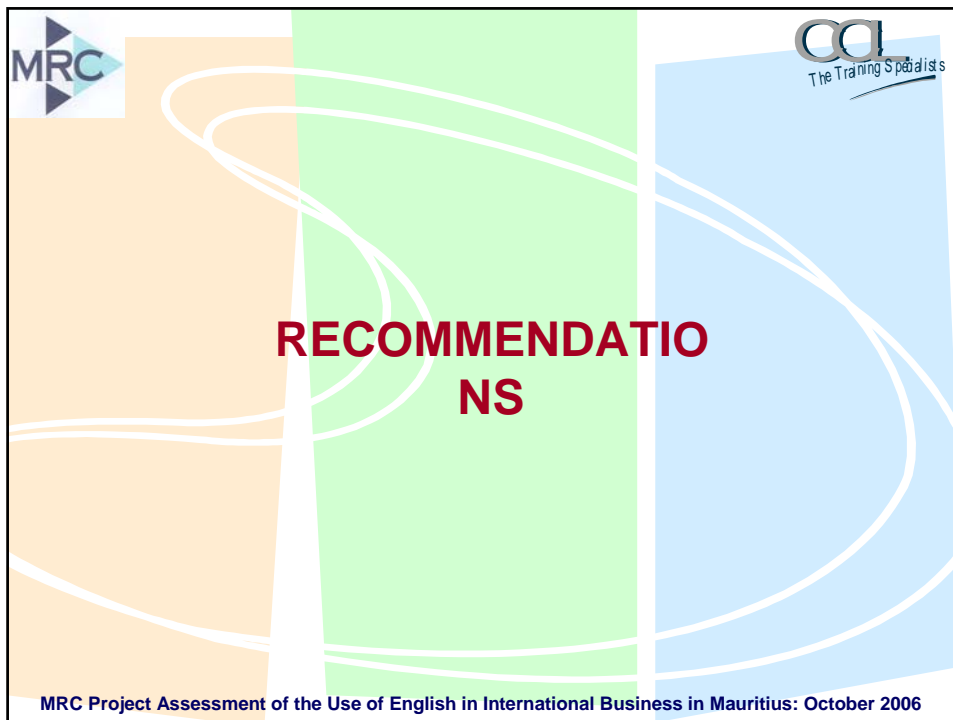
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10. Most Mauritians have little or no interaction with English-speaking expatriates. In the resulting closed circle of non-native speakers using the language for local administrative purposes the level of English attained is seen to be sufficient.
11. The elitist rat-race for top grades in examinations and a place in the 'star schools', which the on-going debate about the A+ grading has worsened, is stifling the acquisition of the creative, wide-ranging language skills needed for effective interaction on the international business scene.
12. There is urgent need for a complete overhaul of English language teaching throughout the education system: the recruitment and training of teachers, the teaching materials available, and the methodologies chosen.

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2. In the **immediate and short term:**

- The media, in particular the MBC and the major national newspapers, to stop dubbing or translating interviews and other news items from English into French
- The MBC to increase the broadcasting of overseas English-speaking channels
- Both private and public sector organisations to contribute to the overall upgrading of the Mauritian workforce by making the improvement in proficiency in English one of their priority training needs

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• Pilot projects such as the HRDC Pilot Project in Call Centre Operations and the proposed BOI/HRDC pre-training scheme to be launched full-scale, with, if possible, funding other than the National Training Fund, to follow on from the statement of intent made in the Budget Speech

- The implementation of current and projected initiatives to reduce the cost and increase the spread of connectivity at home, in schools and at work to be speeded up to help increase firsthand contact with international English via the Internet.
- To make the land connection for foreign stations through Channel 5 by the MBC available in all schools, so that pupils, even from the most disadvantaged families, would be given the means to improve their English, widen their cultural horizons and so improve their overall general knowledge

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### 3. In the **medium and long-term**:

- To upgrade the teaching methodology and materials of English at all levels of the education system in line with the recommendations of the European Common Framework of Reference for Language Teaching concerning communicative language competence with its three basic components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic
- To require that all teachers, lecturers and trainers, whatever subject they teach, to help their pupils acquire the full range of communicative language competence as defined above

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- To make proficiency in English an integral part of teacher training with appropriate assessment procedures as part of the certification process
- To remove the present burden on English language teachers and trainers to find suitable additional materials

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- To set up a national resource library under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, which would include all basic textbooks, both local and foreign, plus a wide range of supplementary textbooks and reading books, together with audiovisual materials such as cassettes, CDs, DVDs and videos and other teaching materials such as word cards, puppets and games, as required by the new teaching methodology, for distribution in schools on a loan basis for the school year

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- To improve the book stock of the school libraries by distributing books on a loan basis once a term through system of library vans
- To set up a pool of qualified native-speaker English language teachers to help bring the necessary language competencies into the education system
- To set up an English Language Centre to coordinate all the initiatives listed in these recommendations and also provide the means for ongoing research to ensure that the teaching of English in Mauritius keeps pace with the demands of the global market-place.

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Thank you for your attention

Your comments and questions please

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