

Englishization and the Appeal of Multinational Corporations among Business Students

Oana Alexandra Alexa

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania

oana.alex@uaic.ro

Abstract

With globalisation also comes Englishization, the tendency to use English as the language of communication almost anytime, anywhere, but especially in the case of multinational corporations (MNCs). They are looking for qualified workforce that is able to perform tasks in a foreign language and their appeal is significant among business students, who understand the importance of improving their skills through (Business) English courses. This paper discusses Englishization in relation with higher education and MNCs, while also presenting the results of a study conducted among undergraduate business students on the appeal of multinationals and the language skills needed in order to access corporate positions. It will show that, although Englishization has become a well-established trend in Romania, which seems to increase the appeal of multinational corporations among highly qualified candidates, it may not be permanent, since many of them are not necessarily looking to work there throughout their career.

Key words: globalisation, Englishization, higher education, job market, multinational corporations

J.E.L. classification: A12, F66, I23, J2, M2, Z13

1. Introduction

Globalisation and Englishization seem to come as a package, as more and more people use English at school and at work on a daily basis, while also switching codes in less formal environments, like when socialising with friends and family. English has become so ingrained in our lives that we no longer find it unusual to hear people speaking it around us, to read signs or posters containing a combination of Romanian and English or to see entire job advertisements in the foreign language when browsing a job search website. English is taught from kindergarten to university and sometimes at work as well, and it has come to be considered as the default foreign language competence requirement for almost any qualified job. The vast majority of undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Iași choose English as their preferred foreign language for the mandatory four-semester language course (which starts at intermediate level), likely being aware that the job market has high expectations from job seekers in terms of foreign language skills.

This paper aims to discuss the concept of ‘Englishization’ in relation to higher education and the current requirements of the workplace, by taking a look at business students’ career goals and how the appeal of corporate jobs shapes Business English courses at university level. Starting with a definition of the term, it will touch upon its benefits and downsides by looking at the relevant literature, briefly analyse the job market in terms of available corporate positions and their language requirements and also present the results of a study on the attractiveness of working for a multinational corporation conducted among 102 undergraduate business students at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Iași. It will show that Englishization in Romania is both a premise and a result of globalisation and the expansion of multinational corporations to markets rich in (human) resources but still profitable in terms of labour costs. Thus, the popularity of English among students at all levels allows them to access better-paid jobs, while also leading to increased requirements for foreign language competence on the labour market.

2. Literature Review

Englishization is partly a consequence of globalization and it essentially refers to the spread of English as the language of communication in non-Anglophone contexts. It has become the *lingua franca* for business communication, but also a requirement for employment, and it "provides a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic indicator of change and acculturation" (Kachru, 1994, p.135). According to David Crystal (2003, p. 3), for a language to achieve global status, it needs to develop "a special role that is recognised in every country." This can be achieved by either making it the official language of the country or by "making it a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching, even though this language has no official status" (Crystal, 2003, p. 4). The latter has definitely been the case for Romania, where English is the preferred first foreign language taught in schools and universities alike. At the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Iași, for example, English is taught to all undergraduate students for four semesters, with one study programme (Business Administration) taught exclusively in English. Teaching ESP has always been closely connected to the requirements of the labour market, as it stems from very specific needs. Undergraduate Business English courses aim to prepare their (mostly) pre-experienced students for the recruitment process and further entering the job market, which nowadays requires them to speak at least one foreign language (mostly English) at intermediate level or higher and display a wide array of skills even for entry-level positions.

According to a Cambridge English and QS Global Employer Survey (2016), based on data collected from 5,373 employers in 38 countries, English language skills are important for over 95% of employers in many non-native English-speaking countries. However, the same study reports at least a 40% gap between the required and the actual skills that employees have, in every industry. Reading and speaking are considered by employers to be the most important language skills, but only a very small percentage (around 3%) are planning to improve the English skills of their employees. Of course, these results may differ when looking at specific countries or territories, but the bottom line is that recruiters are normally looking for candidates who already possess English language and other practical skills, especially when it comes to management/executive positions. A superficial look at the two most popular recruitment websites in Romania (ejobs.ro and bestjobs.eu) reveals that most job titles and a large number of job advertisements (posted for all career levels) are in English, and the vast majority of positions require at least a minimum level of English language competence. In the case of multinational corporations however, this is the norm. According to Ellis and Johnson (1994), employees who seek language training because of the demands of their jobs can be placed into three main categories: managers (because they work with international affairs and, since they occupy important positions, companies are more inclined to invest in training them), technical staff (who may either be promoted to managerial positions or need to communicate with other departments and/or clients and business partners) and secretaries and clerical workers (who also have a lot of responsibilities and need to communicate with a variety of people). Nevertheless, we have reached a point where it is difficult for any employee, no matter their position in a company, not to come across any situation in which even the most basic knowledge of the English language come in handy, from using the computer to reading the instructions on a product's packaging or to giving directions to a foreigner trying to find his or her way to somebody's office. For the in-service learner, English holds the key to professional development, as "it may be the gateway to promotion, the requirement for an international posting or the means to success in next week's presentation to management" (Brieger, 1997, p. 13). And with the advent of new technologies, corporations now expect their employees to stay on top of alternative means of communication, like instant messaging, wikis, blogging, micro-blogging, and videoconferencing (Chan, 2020).

Still, the ability to speak one foreign language is often the minimum level of competence required nowadays. It is important to note that Tietze, Holden and Barner-Rasmussen (2016, p. 312) compare "the highly complex transnational business communication capital of MNCs" to the behaviour in a metropolis, referring not only to English but also to other national languages (like French, German, Chinese etc.), "special languages (i.e. occupation-specific language forms) and corporate sociolects." Kim (2016) similarly points out that only focussing on Englishization in MNCs is an oversimplification, since it is not the only language strategy employed by such companies. Rather, the tendency is towards a multilingual strategy, which is obvious from the requirements included in their job ads. English is no longer the only foreign language candidates need to speak because, based

on the company’s profile and target customers, they will also have to use a second or third language. Thus, it is argued that “the very process of economic globalization has by now detached itself from the dynamics of Englishization and has adopted a much more sophisticated, *multilingual* strategy” (Dor, 2004, p. 102, emphasis in the original).

However, English remains at the core of both MNCs’ communication activities and a lot of the scientific and teaching work in the academia. Jackson and Primecz (2019) argue that even though Englishization appears to positively offer scholars the means to publish their research in top journals, it also highlights the discrepancies between native speakers and those who struggle to learn academic English in order to read the literature and write articles in the foreign language. In terms of the teaching and learning process in higher education, Van Parjis (2021) emphasizes the fact that the universities’ desire to rank well and receive funding through internationalization has led to poor quality education and is detrimental to both socially less advantaged students and national languages. Similarly, in business, “critics of globalization warn that lack of proficiency in English and the skills prized by today’s knowledge industries (e.g. advanced technological skills) can disadvantage individuals and organizations by denying them access to resources and global markets (e.g. lucrative contracts, intercultural/international contracts)” (Jackson, 2014, p. 274).

Consequently, balance needs to be achieved between taking advantage of the global opportunities (through the extensive use of English) and losing our national identities, but this also explains why recruitment sites are full of job advertisements written in English, because, at this point, job seekers are used to being required to possess above average language skills. Moreover, smaller companies have started to take advantage of the Englishization trend and try to mimic MNCs in order to attract candidates looking for those benefits usually provided by corporations only. In fact, globalisation itself has come to be seen as the result of multinationals’ activities, which rely on foreign direct investment in markets characterised by rich but cheap resources (Haller, 2016), so they have definitely started a trend in terms of recruitment standards and employee satisfaction on the local job market.

So, what exactly makes multinational corporations so appealing to business students, what do their ideal candidate profiles look like and how does this impact the undergraduate English courses they attend? First, we will look at the results of a study conducted by Catalyst (2020), which details the most desired employers in our country, based on the answers of over 14,000 respondents with a higher education background in the fields of business, IT&C, engineering, social sciences and medicine/pharma. Unsurprisingly, they are all multinational corporations. The top 5 contains the following names, in the order of preference: Continental, Oracle, Microsoft, Amazon and IBM. Continental occupies the first place in the respondents’ preferences for the second time in a row. This proves that MNCs have both the know-how and the financial power to provide employee satisfaction. Their business model usually includes a combination of higher-than-average salaries, extra benefits like vouchers, a bonus system, private medical insurance and a type of corporate culture that allows for more flexibility in terms of work schedules and task completion, teamwork, extracurricular activities, training courses and/or travelling, which are appealing to potential candidates, especially in contrast with the traditional work environments. At the same time, a look at the job postings on two popular recruitment websites shows that all qualified positions at Continental require English language skills, mostly at advanced level, with a few even requiring being proficient (Bestjobs.eu, Ejobs.ro, 2021). Moreover, the job ads themselves are all in English, except for the ones where foreign language competence is not required. The same is true for the other four most desirable employers and, wherever other foreign languages (like French or German) are required, English is present as well. Thus, it is not surprising that these three are the languages taught at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Iași, with English being the top option in terms of undergraduate students’ preferences.

Consequently, teachers are faced with the task of identifying and developing the language skills needed to perform work tasks in a multicultural environment, which requires both specialised (technical) knowledge but also the ability to communicate effectively using a foreign language in a variety of situations. Corporations typically test the candidates’ language skills through various tools (from written tests to phone or face-to-face interviews), which are sometimes more comprehensive than the specialised, technical knowledge tests, so this proves the prevalence of linguistic competence over other aspects involved at working for a multinational corporation. Moreover, companies often

provide training courses themselves (usually in the case of other foreign languages, like Spanish or Italian, but also English), in order to make sure that their employees language level is up to standard in terms of the tasks to be performed.

Relevant information can be found below about a study which was conducted among business students with a view to illustrate their perspective on some of the aspects discussed so far, specifically the appeal of corporate jobs in relation to the Englishization of the Romanian society, in general, and that of higher education, in particular.

3. Research methodology

In order to take a closer look at prospective job candidates’ preferences, a questionnaire was devised using Google Forms and distributed online to first- and second-year undergraduates at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration in Iași. The study set out to establish the appeal of multinational corporations among business students and also to shed some light on the English language requirements involved in such corporate jobs. The questionnaire was devised in English and consisted of 13 questions in total, including those referring to demographic information. One hundred and two responses were recorded, over a period of one week.

The main research questions were the following:

- Would business students choose to work for a multinational corporation? Why/Why not?
- Have they applied for a job at an MNC and if yes, what did the application/recruitment process involve in terms of (English) foreign language use?
- If they worked or are currently working at an MNC, were/are they using their English language skills to complete the tasks and, if so, which ones?
- Do they see themselves having a long career at a multinational corporation?

The questionnaire was distributed to students from six specialisations (CIG – Accounting and Business Information Systems, FB - Finance and Banking, IE – Business Information Systems, EAI – Economics and International Business, MG – Management, MK – Marketing). All the demographic information is synthetised in the following table.

Table no. 1. Demographic information

Category	Number of respondents: 102					
Gender	Female: 70			Male: 32		
Age	18-25: 100		25-30: 2		Over 30: 0	
Year of study	1 st year: 18			2 nd year: 84		
Field of specialisation	CIG: 16	FB: 15	IE: 25	EAI: 0	MG: 17	MK: 16

Source: (Author’s own survey, 2021)

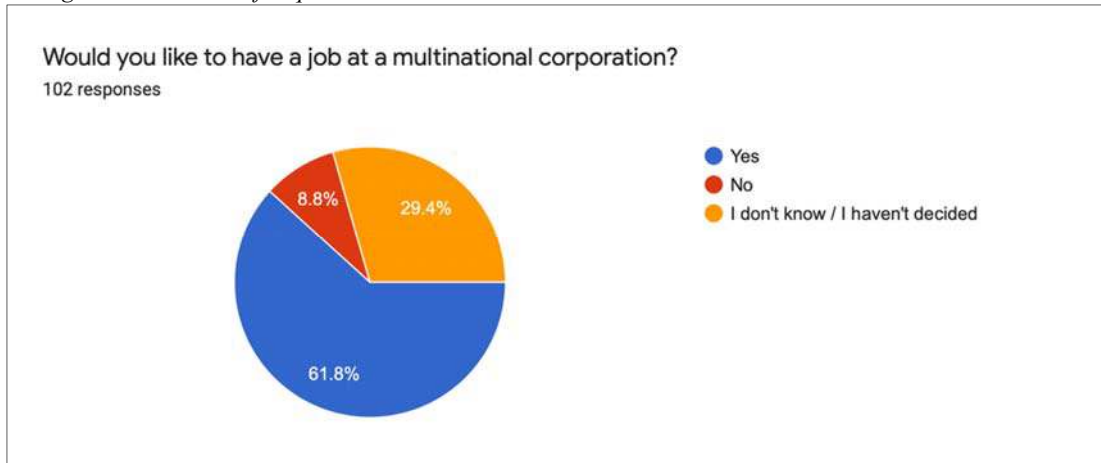
The results of the study are presented below, alongside a discussion of the overall appeal of working for a multinational corporation among undergraduate business students.

4. Findings and Discussion

The first question in the questionnaire required students to say whether they would like to have a job at a multinational corporation. There were three possible options and 63 respondents (61.8%) answered ‘Yes,’ 30 respondents (29.4%) answered ‘No’ and 9 (8.8%) answered ‘I don’t know’/‘I haven’t decided’ to this question.

This shows that more than half of the respondents would be interested in working for such a company, possibly even before they graduate from university. While a significant number has not made a decision yet (due to various reasons, among which may be the fact that they are still in their first or second year), it is likely that, by the end of their studies, they will at least take this possibility into account, since a large number of the advertised positions in large cities (such as Iași) on specialized websites are within such companies.

Figure no. 1. Results for question 1

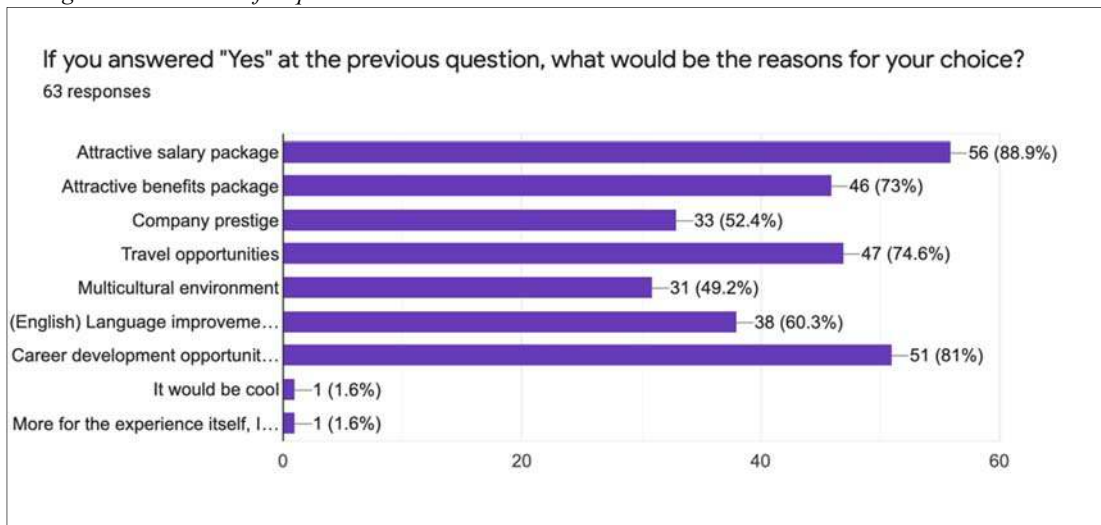


Source: (Author's own survey, 2021)

If the respondents answered 'Yes' to the first question, they were directed to the second one, which required them to tick the reasons for their choice or provide their own. The available options were the following:

- Attractive salary package
- Attractive benefits package
- Company prestige
- Travel opportunities
- Multicultural environment
- (English) language improvement opportunities
- Career development opportunities
- Other

Figure no. 2. Results for question 2



Source: (Author's own survey, 2021)

Out of the 63 respondents for this question, the majority (88.9%) chose the first reason, 51 (81%) chose 'Career development opportunities,' 47 (74.6%) chose 'Travel opportunities,' followed closely (73%) by 'Attractive benefits package.' '(English) Language improvement opportunities' was the reason behind 38 (60.3%) respondents' choices, while 'Company prestige' and the 'Multicultural environment' appealed to 33 (52.4%) and 31 (49.2%) of the students respectively. One student

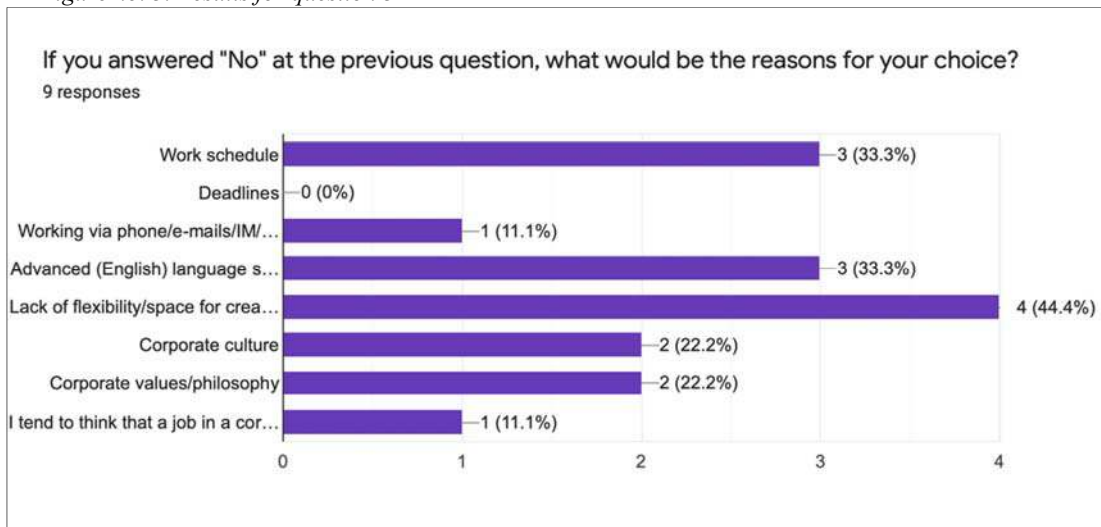
(1.6%) responded that ‘It would be cool,’ while another one (1.6%) added that he or she would like to work for an MNC ‘more for the experience itself, I wouldn’t work all my life for a Multinational Corporation.’

As previously stated, corporations have relocated their operations to markets such as Romania because they can find qualified workforce who can speak English well at lower costs, which allows them to provide attractive salary and benefit packages and still make a good profit. In an environment where the concept of employee satisfaction did not really exist thirty years ago, it is not surprising that (prospective) candidates value the opportunity to have a pleasant work environment and develop their career, which MNCs usually provide them with.

Those who had answered ‘No’ at the first question were asked to give their reasons as well. They had to choose from the following options:

- Work schedule
- Deadlines
- Working via phone/e-mails/IM/CMR (Technology-based job)
- Advanced (English) language skills requirements
- Lack of flexibility/space for creativity
- Corporate culture
- Corporate values/philosophy
- Other

Figure no. 3. Results for question 3



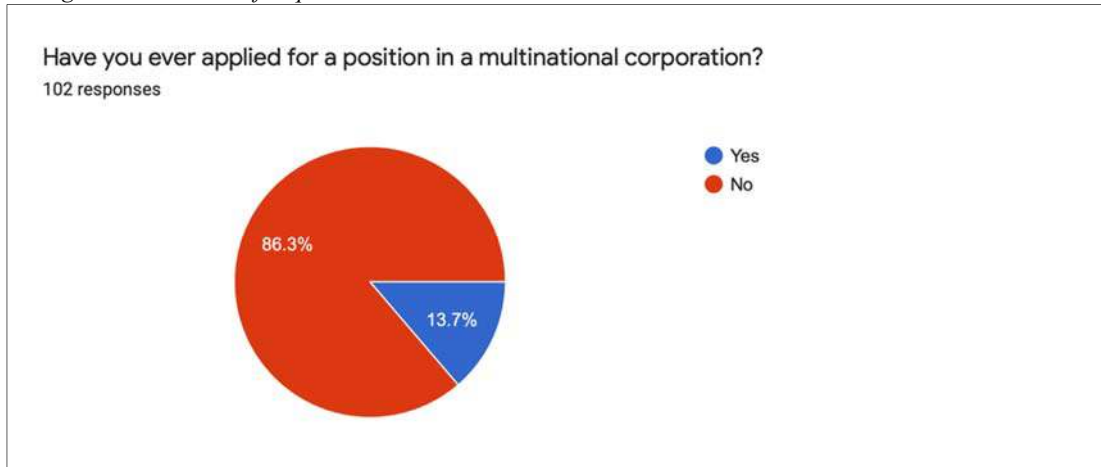
Source: (Author’s own survey, 2021)

Out of the 9 responses for this question, 4 (44.4%) referred to the perceived ‘Lack of flexibility/space for creativity’ when working for a MNC, 3 (33.3%) were about the ‘Work schedule’ and ‘Advanced (English) language skills requirements’ respectively, while 2 respondents (22.2%) chose ‘Corporate culture’ and ‘Corporate values/philosophy’ respectively. One student (11.1%) chose ‘Working via phone/e-mails/IM/CMR (Technology-based job)’ as the reason, while another one (11.1%) answered: ‘I tend to think that a job in a corporate setting would limit my ability to evolve professionally at a certain point.’ No respondents chose ‘Deadlines’ as a reason for not wanting to work for an MNC.

Consequently, even though working for a multinational corporation has its benefits (as discussed above), business students are aware that this comes with some downsides as well, which might even discourage them to apply for a position altogether. Corporate jobs are perceived as inflexible, both in terms of work schedules and other requirements, while corporate culture and philosophy does not fit every personality. However, a lot of the respondents have already applied for a corporate job, presumably to test out such an opportunity before dismissing it completely.

The following two questions referred to applying for a job at a multinational corporation and the recruitment process. When asked whether they had ever applied for a position at a MNC, 88 respondents (86.3%) out of the total of 102 said they hadn't, with 14 (13.7%) answering that they had.

Figure no. 4. Results for question 4

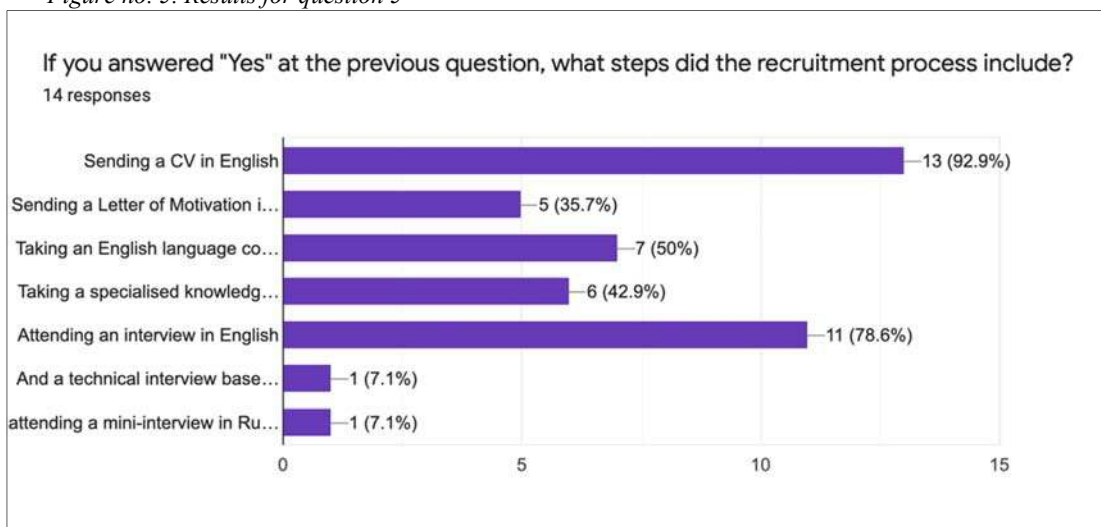


Source: (Author's own survey, 2021)

Those who answered affirmatively were next asked about what the recruitment process involved, with the following options:

- Sending a CV in English
- Sending a Letter of Motivation in English
- Taking an English language competence test
- Taking a specialised knowledge test in English
- Attending an interview in English
- Other

Figure no. 5. Results for question 5



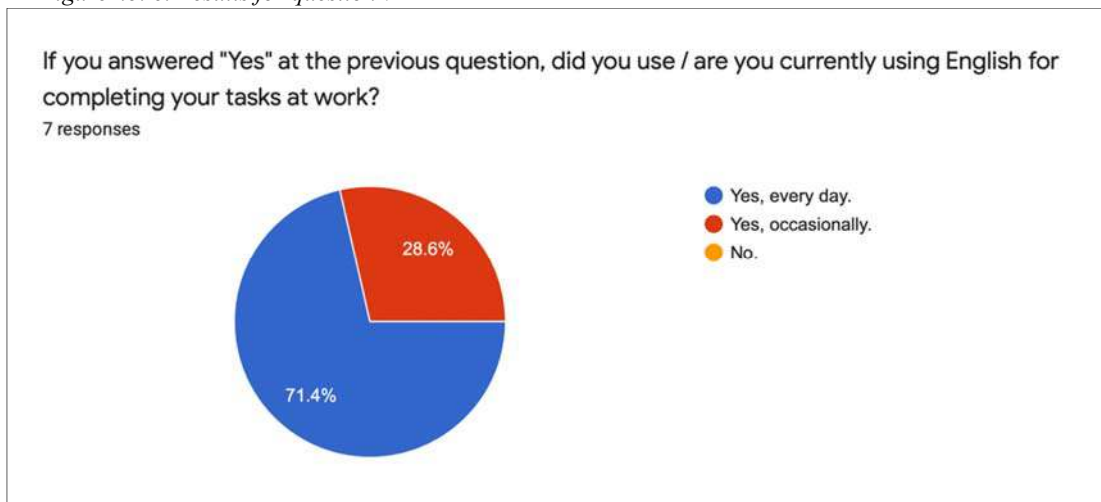
Source: (Author's own survey, 2021)

Out of the 14 responses to this question, 13 students (92.9%) chose the first option, 'Sending a CV in English.' Eleven respondents (78.6%) also attended an interview in English, 7 (50%) had to take an English language competence test, 6 (42.9%) took a specialised knowledge test in English,

while 5 (35.7%) sent a letter of motivation in English as well. One respondent (7.1%) added that he or she had to also attend a mini-interview in Russian (which was needed for the position he/she applied for), while another one (7.1%) mentioned ‘A technical interview based on my knowledge of the field.’ The recruitment process at MNCs clearly relies heavily on the candidates’ English language competence, as it can be observed from the job advertisements available online. Moreover, this reflects the high percentage of language use for the completion of work tasks.

Out of the 14 students who had applied for a corporate position, 7 (50%) worked or are currently working at such a company (internships included), so they were next asked how often they used/are currently using English for completing their tasks at work.

Figure no. 6. Results for question 7

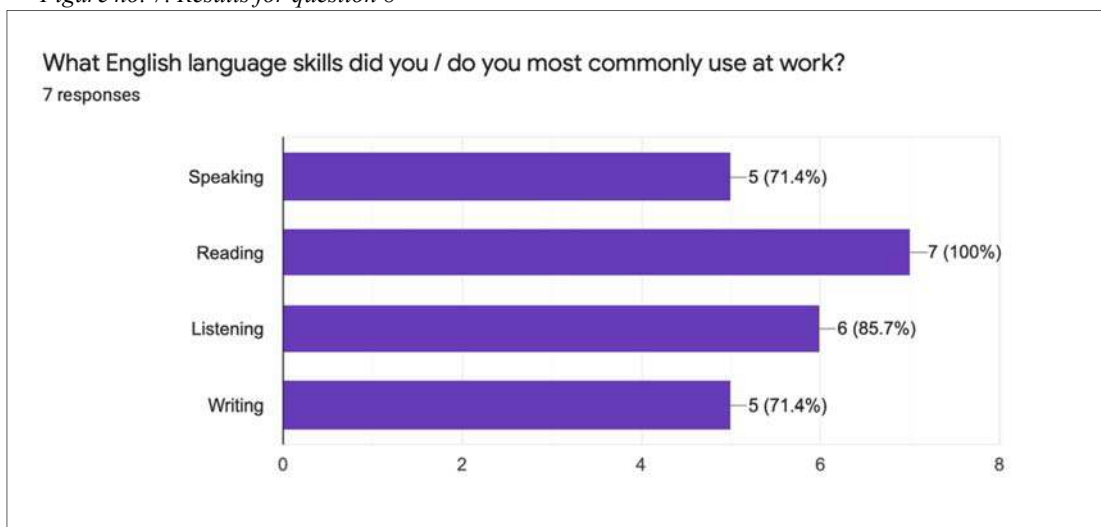


Source: (Author’s own survey, 2021)

Five of them (71.4%) answered ‘Yes, every day,’ while 2 (28.6%) answered ‘Yes, occasionally,’ with 0 answers for the third option, which was ‘No.’

Next, respondents had to choose the English skills they most commonly used at work. ‘Reading’ was the top choice (100%), followed by ‘Listening’ (85.7%), and ‘Speaking’ and ‘Writing’ (both at 71.4%).

Figure no. 7. Results for question 8

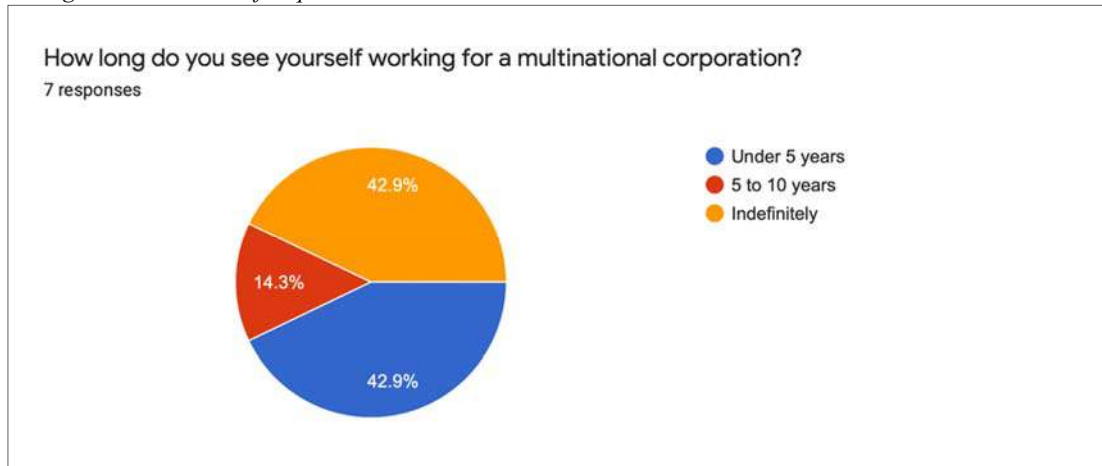


Source: (Author’s own survey, 2021)

The results for this question are consistent with those presented in the previously cited study conducted by Cambridge English and QS, but they also show that all four skills are required, since most of the tasks are in English and a good level of language competence is needed to complete them.

Finally, when asked how long they see themselves working for an MNC, 3 respondents (42.9%) chose the ‘Under 5 years’ option, the ‘Indefinitely’ option was selected by 3 respondents as well, while 1 student (14.3%) chose the ‘5 to 10 years’ one.

Figure no. 8. Results for question 9



Source: (Author’s own survey, 2021)

This indicates that, even though corporations are appealing, a lot of candidates are not willing to spend their entire career in such an environment. They are more likely to try things out, gain experience and then move on to something else, which is more consistent with their career goals further down the road.

This study has its limitations in terms of the number of students questioned, but it does reveal the fact that there is a definite interest in working for a multinational corporation among business students, who are generally not deterred by the language-related competencies required for such positions. Further research is certainly needed in order to be able to make generalisations, and it would definitely be interesting to find out whether and how their opinions change with time, as they get closer to graduation. However, in the past year and a half, given the switch to online education during the pandemic, more and more students have started to combine education with work, as they feel distance learning is more compatible with having a job, which might have also led to an increase in the number of students working for corporations.

5. Conclusions

The current job market in Romania and the business students’ preferences as expressed in the study conducted at FEAA Iași clearly show that there is a significant interest in corporate jobs, especially in big university centres where MNCs have expanded their operations. The Englishization of both society in general and higher education in particular has provided them with a highly-qualified workforce, who in turn is eager to access corporate jobs due to the benefits they provide and the opportunity to further develop their career in a multicultural environment. Thus, the two are in a sort of symbiotic relationship, but we must not forget that corporations are constantly watching their costs and may at some point be unable to fulfil the increasing financial requirements of their employees. On the other hand, as the study showed, job seekers are not planning to spend too much time working for corporations, seeing them as a good starting point in order to gain experience but not necessarily worth dedicating their entire careers to, which does say a lot about the perception of corporate culture among the younger, highly-educated generation. They are becoming increasingly aware of their value and prefer to relocate abroad or start their own business if they do not feel satisfied with what is currently offered on the market.

English seems to continue its supremacy as a widely-used foreign language in Romania, both in the academic environment and on the job market, with the pandemic seemingly accelerating the trend as online communication has allowed us to connect virtually with even more people and attend global events where English is the access key to effective information exchange. Thus, although Englishization may be seen as a threat to national culture and can certainly put several categories of people at a disadvantage when it comes to access to information or to well-paid jobs, it is also a means to tap into global resources which can open doors career-wise and not only.

Disclaimer: This case study and the corresponding questionnaire have not been ordered or endorsed by any academic institution or private company, including the ones mentioned in this article.

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