



THE EF CORPORATE LEARNING MATURITY REPORT

AI, Personalization, and the Path to High-Impact Language Programs

A framework for fostering highly developed language
training programs that drive business success

2026
edition



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[The greatest impact that language learning has had is] employees are more confident and better equipped to conduct international negotiations, clients are more satisfied because they feel understood, and there is a stronger bond between employees.”

– CEO at a consulting firm in Brazil with \$501 million+ annual revenue and 10,000+ employees



Executive summary

Senior leaders in multinational organizations understand that language skills, particularly in English, influence the quality of everyday collaboration across global teams. What remains more difficult is assessing the broader business impact of language training and determining how its value can be measured in monetary terms.

In 2025, EF Corporate Learning published the first Maturity Report, which showed a clear correlation between the 'maturity', or level of development, of a company's language program and company-wide business metrics, including profitability, growth, and employee retention.

Building on that foundation, this year's report tracks the business results of 1,300 multinational companies and maps them against the maturity of their language programs. The analysis reveals an even stronger relationship between language program maturity and financial performance than last year, with the most mature programs consistently

associated with higher profit margins and sustained business growth.

This edition also explores what enables companies to progress further up the maturity curve, including the role of AI and learning personalization. Most organizations have introduced AI in some capacity in their language training programs, but the efficacy of this varies depending on the features leveraged. Likewise, while HR leaders listed personalized learning as the most important feature of a language program, only a minority of organizations currently offer this in practice.

Together, these findings give organizations a clearer understanding of how to strengthen their language training. As the following pages show, companies that advance along the maturity scale continue to report stronger financial performance and employee engagement.

Profile of respondents (see page 28 to learn more)



Key findings



Personalization and AI are becoming defining features of mature programs

94%

of companies say they are using AI in their language programs, but only 29% have fully implemented it

10x

Very high maturity organizations are ten times more likely to have fully implemented AI in their language programs (vs. low maturity category)

#1 feature

HR and L&D leaders list personalized and one-to-one learning as the most important feature in a language training program

37%

of companies offer personalized learning journeys (rising to 89% among very high maturity organizations)



Mature language training programs correlate with stronger financial performance

2x

Very high maturity organizations report almost twice the net profit margin, compared to low maturity businesses (23% vs. 12% net profit)

95%

of very high maturity companies saw revenue rise last year, and 98% expect further revenue growth next year

86%

of very high maturity firms expanded into two or more new markets in the past two years (vs. 24% in very low maturity category)



Employee engagement and retention rise with language program maturity

92%

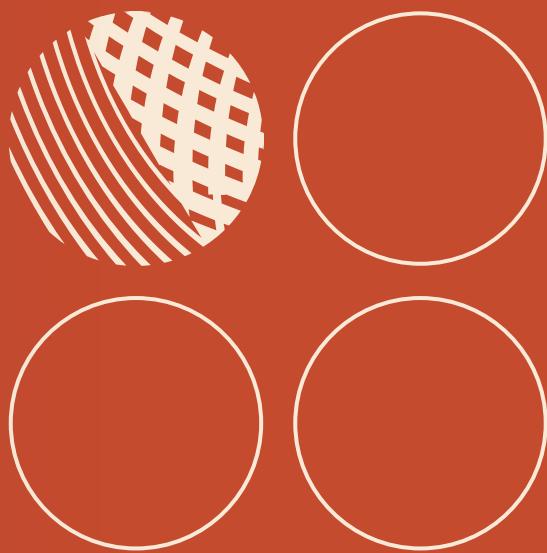
of very high maturity organizations report high or very high employee engagement (vs. 39% in very low maturity category)

2x

Very high maturity organizations are almost twice as likely to report minimal employee turnover and high retention (vs. very low maturity category)

86%

of very high maturity businesses have a strong company culture (vs. 27% among very low maturity companies)



Introduction

How do we define language program maturity?

Our maturity model is a framework that evaluates the current state of an organization's language training program. Language programs are assessed on the five characteristics below and grouped into five levels

depending on their total score, from "very low" to "very high" maturity. This maturity score can then be tracked against company-wide business metrics, including revenue, profitability and employee engagement.

How do we score language programs from low to high 'maturity'?

Characteristic	Scoring
Program content and learning methodology	1-5 points
Personalization of learning journeys	0-5 points
Regularity of review & update of training program	0-5 points
Alignment with business and performance objectives	0-10 points
Embedding in company learning culture	0-5 points

The more developed ('mature') the characteristic, the higher the score

	Very low maturity	Low maturity	Moderate maturity	High maturity	Very high maturity
Points	1 to 15	16 to 20	21 to 23	24 to 27	28 to 30



Maturity distribution by region

There has been some progress in overall maturity levels since last year, with 18% of businesses scoring in the very high maturity category in 2026, compared to 14% in 2025.

This year, North America has moved into the leading position, with a larger proportion of organizations in the high and very high maturity categories. The region also shows stronger adoption of AI features and deeper program integration.

Latin America remains a strong performer, especially in strategic alignment; 93% of organizations in the region say their programs are fully or mostly aligned with business objectives.

Across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa there is steady progression. Improvements appear in cultural integration, program access, and alignment with company goals. However, review frequency and personalization vary across markets.

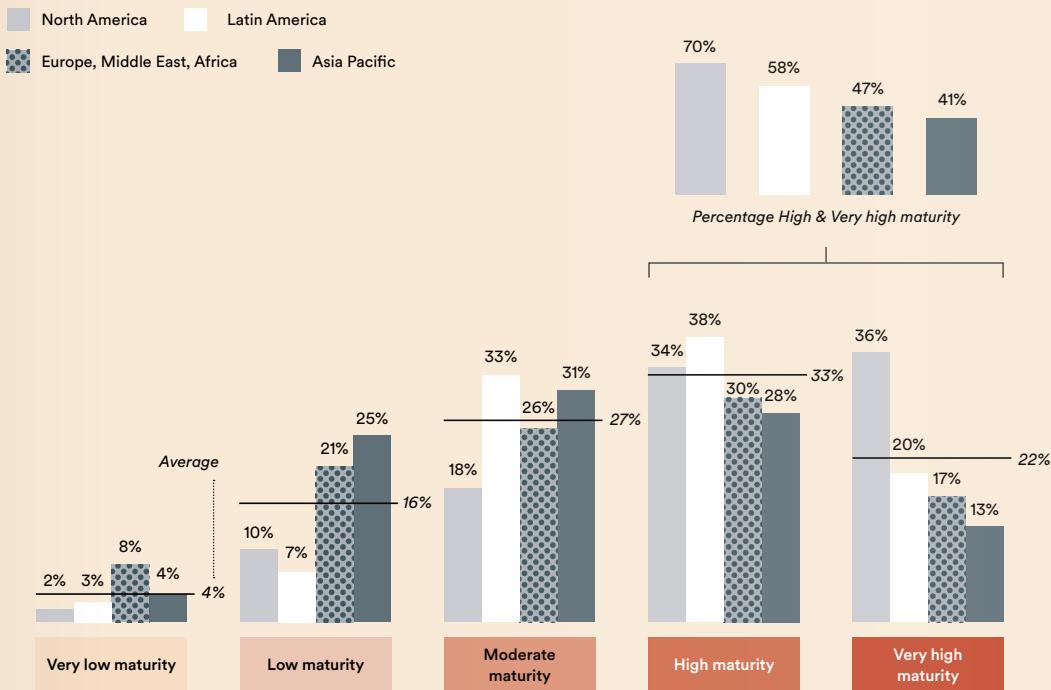
The Asia-Pacific region shows more incremental movement this year, with modest growth in the higher maturity categories. Many organizations in the region continue to focus on foundational program elements, with lower levels of AI adoption and personalization compared with other regions.

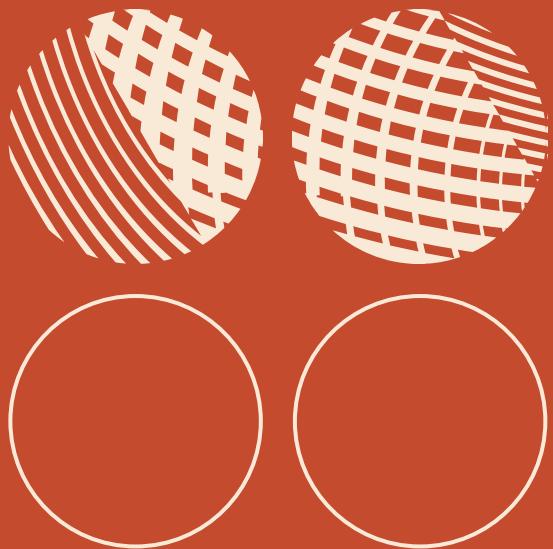
18% of businesses score in the very high maturity category in 2026, compared to 14% in 2025



North America has the highest maturity level across all regions, followed by Latin America

Showing the proportion of businesses at each maturity level based on region:





Why should organizations
invest in developing mature
language programs?

Mature programs support profitability and financial growth

Organizations with high or very high maturity language programs continue to outperform their peers across revenue, profit, and market expansion indicators. This year's results reinforce the pattern established in 2025, that higher language program maturity aligns with stronger business performance.

The financial gap between maturity levels is widening year on year. While profit margins rose across the board, the steepest gains were concentrated among very high maturity organizations, indicating that the returns associated with advanced programs are accelerating. Revenue expectations follow the same gradient, with the highest maturity companies forecasting continued growth in the year ahead.

Revenue, net profit and market expansion all correlate closely with language program maturity



FIGURE #1A

Did your company's revenue increase or decrease last year?

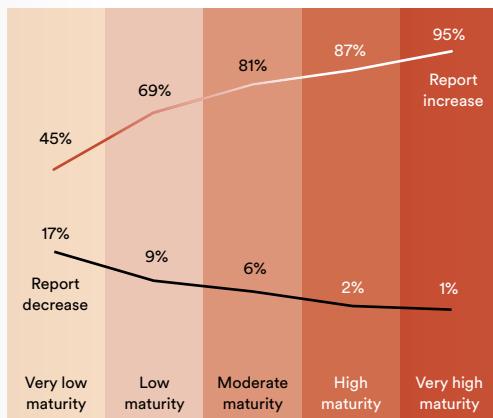


FIGURE #1B

Does your company project an increase or decrease in revenue next year?

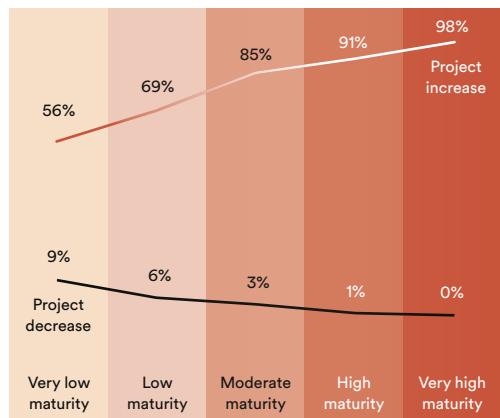
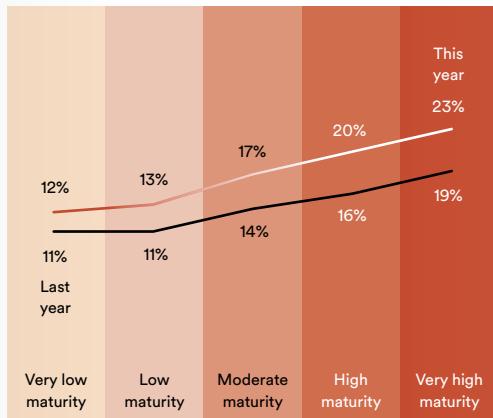


FIGURE #2

Average % net profit last year vs this year



Average % difference in net profit last year compared to this year

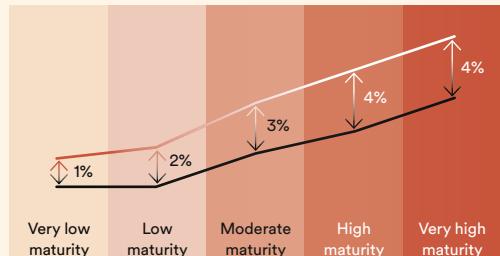
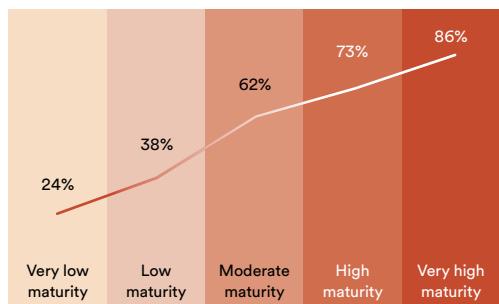


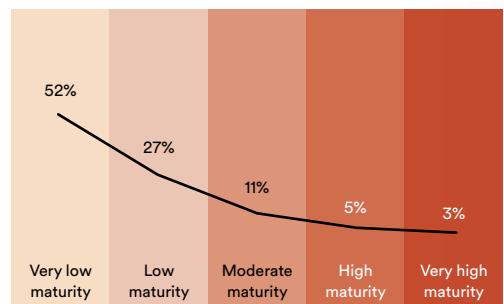
FIGURE #3

How many new markets has your business expanded into in the last 2 years?

2+ new markets



0 new markets



International expansion also correlates closely with language program maturity. Companies with more developed programs are significantly more likely to have entered new markets in the past two years, suggesting that language capability remains an important enabler of internationalization plans and commercial opportunity. Meanwhile, organizations in the very low maturity category are stagnating, with 52% not having expanded into any additional markets in the last 2 years (an increase from 32% in the 2025 report).

“[The greatest impact of language training is] it helped our team connect authentically with clients worldwide creating trust that numbers can’t measure.”

– Director at a technology company in the US



A culture of learning strengthens employee engagement and reduces turnover

This year's findings again indicate that organizations with mature language programs report stronger levels of employee engagement and greater workforce stability. Nearly all very high maturity organizations state that engagement in their workforce is very high, while lower maturity organizations are more likely to see signs of disengagement.

Very high maturity companies report more stable workforces. They are almost twice as likely as very low maturity organizations to report very low employee turnover, indicating that well-designed language programs support retention.

The strength of the underlying culture appears to play a role. Around half of the surveyed organizations describe their culture as strong and well-defined. Companies in the high maturity group are considerably more likely to do so.

The findings suggest that language maturity supports a learning culture that attracts and retains talent, increases engagement, and strengthens organizational cohesion across global teams.

[The greatest impact that language learning has had is] employees now identify more strongly with our culture, which improves employee retention."

– CEO at a technology company in China with \$5.1 billion+ annual revenue and 5,000+ employees

FIGURE #4
Companies that report high or very high employee engagement

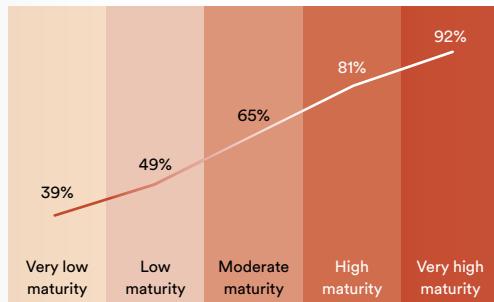


FIGURE #5
Companies that report minimal employee turnover and high retention

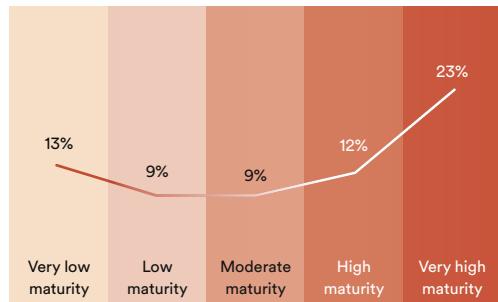


FIGURE #6A
Companies that report a strong, well-defined culture that emphasizes collaboration, innovation, and well-being

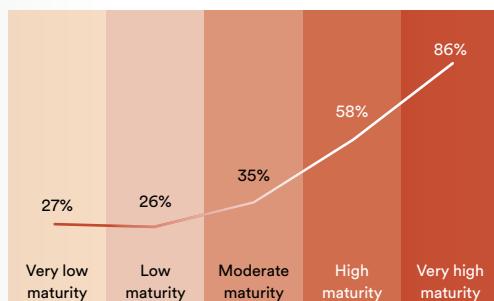
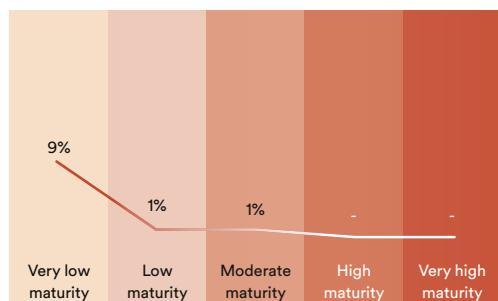


FIGURE #6B
Companies that do not prioritize company culture



Language program maturity fosters innovation practices

Organizations with high-maturity language programs report stronger innovation capability in both their approach and their practices. More than 80% of very high maturity companies invest in research and development, while lower maturity companies are more likely to take a reactive approach to market changes.

This year's study introduced a metric to assess how widely innovation is practiced across the organization. The results show that high-maturity programs also

correspond with a consistent, organization-wide practice of innovation supported by cross-functional initiatives and clear ownership. Mature programs appear to provide the communication infrastructure and shared working language that enable effective idea sharing and coordination across global teams.

[The greatest impact that language learning has had is] improving innovation capacity through exchange from multiple perspectives."

– CEO at a transport and logistics company in Sweden with \$501 million+ annual revenue

FIGURE #7A

Companies that actively invest in research and development for new products, services, or processes

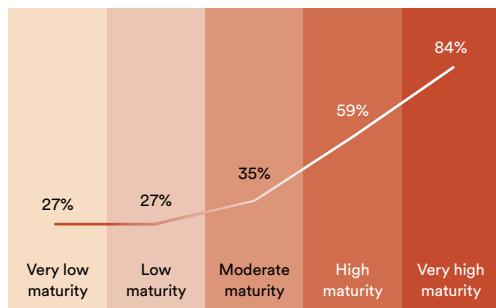
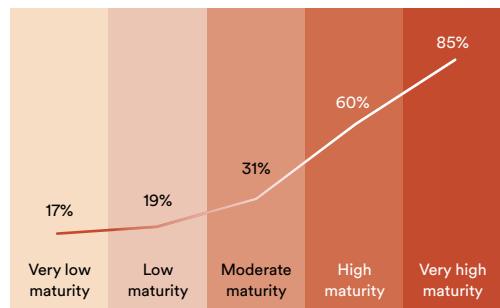


FIGURE #7B

Companies reporting that innovation is a consistent, organization-wide practice with cross-functional initiatives and clear ownership



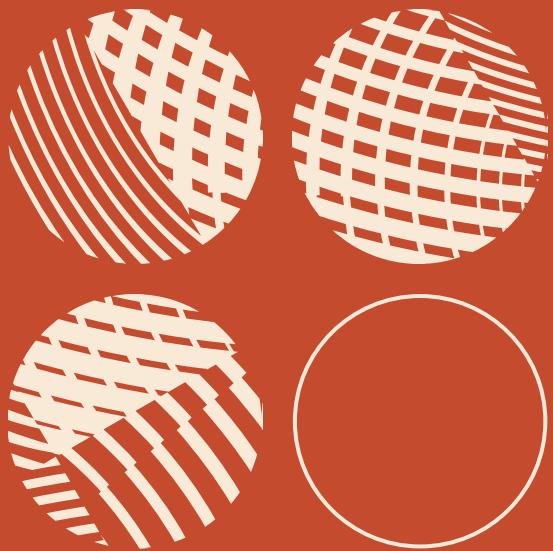
High maturity companies invest in research and development, while lower maturity companies are more likely to take a reactive approach to market changes

Higher maturity organizations also demonstrate behaviors typical of innovative cultures within their language programs. They review content frequently, make decisions based on evidence, and adopt new methods or technologies, including wider use of AI in their training programs. These habits reflect a way of working that supports continuous improvement.

"It allows employees to develop, so that they can go to other sites and bring back ideas to improve our site."

– Director at a manufacturing company in France with \$10 billion+ annual revenue and 10,000+ employees





What sets successful language programs apart?

The findings in the previous sections illustrate a clear relationship between language program maturity and business outcomes. This section examines the features most closely associated with high maturity and how they contribute to program effectiveness.

The role of AI in developing mature programs

This year's study examined the role of AI in corporate language programs for the first time. The findings show that AI has already become a significant part of the learning ecosystem, especially in mature language programs. Adoption rises steadily across the maturity levels and fully implemented AI remains concentrated in the most advanced programs.

Meanwhile, the majority of very low maturity organizations do not use any AI tools or use them in small trials or experiments only. Despite this, company size impacts

adoption levels quite significantly, as larger enterprises (50,000+ employees) are twice as likely to report no AI usage, compared to the average across the board, potentially due to the complexities of deploying AI across all locations and employees.

The AI features being used also differ across maturity levels. Advanced AI capabilities, such as AI speaking practice, speech and writing analysis, AI-driven feedback, and personalized learning journeys, are more likely to be present in higher maturity programs. The use of these features may contribute to the higher maturity level of these programs, by improving personalization and program content and methodology. On average, organizations use three AI features, which suggests that once AI becomes part of the program, adoption often broadens to include multiple touchpoints within the learning experience.

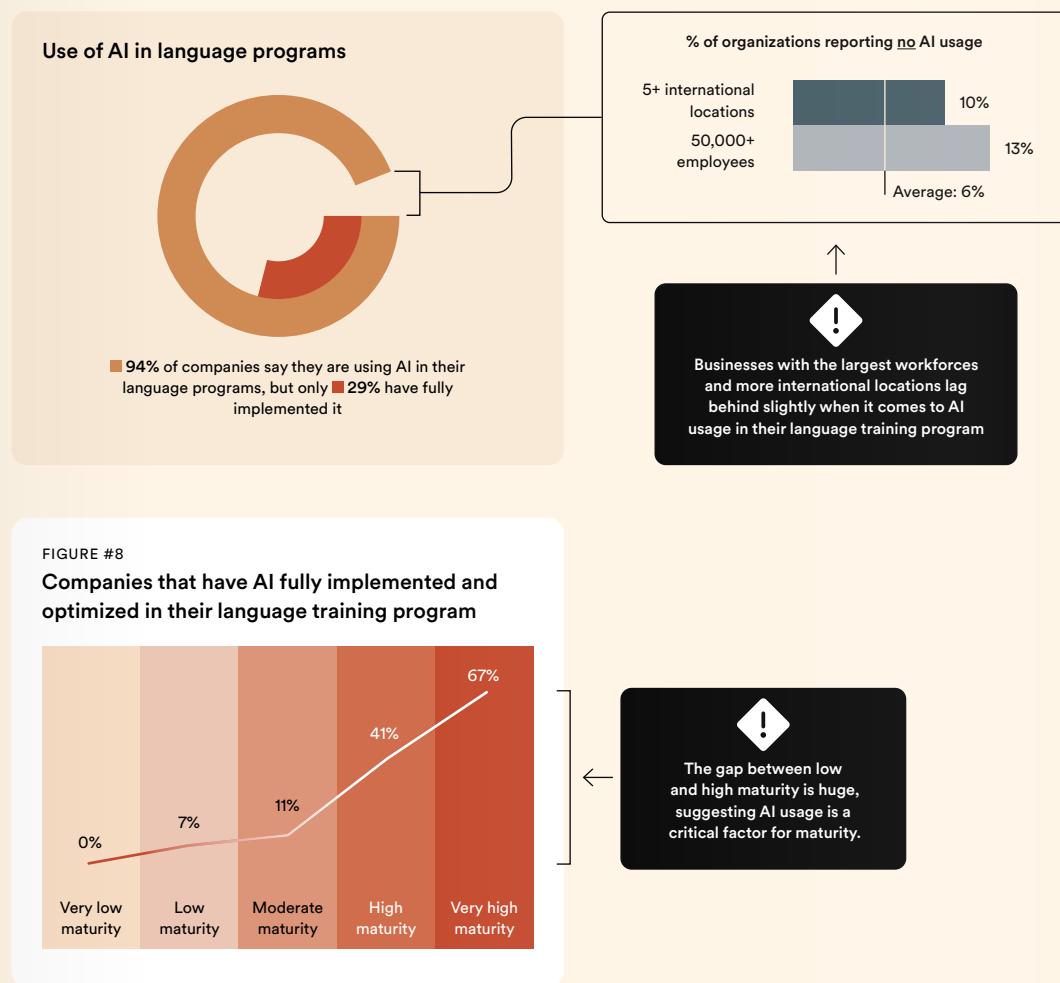
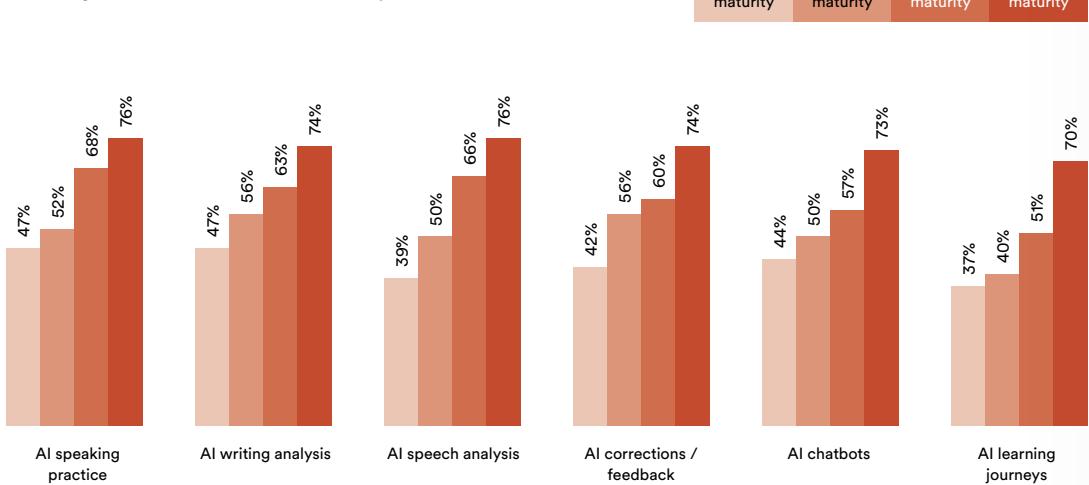


FIGURE #9

Showing % of businesses that currently use those AI features



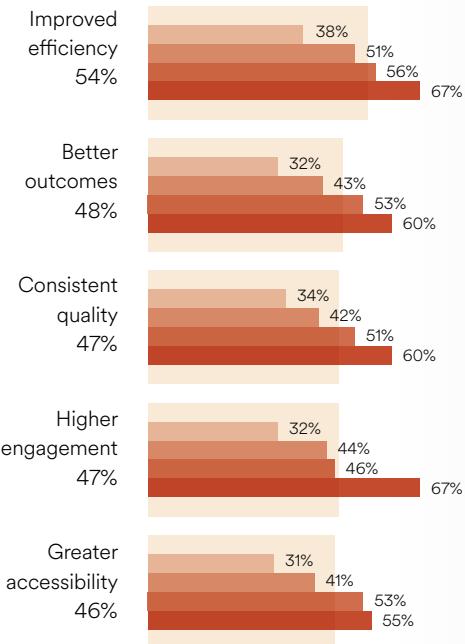
Note: Respondents only include those who are using AI in at least some areas of training (base 1,138)

The impact of AI is broadly recognized across the sample, with 99% of organizations using AI reporting at least one positive effect. For low-maturity organizations, lower costs appear as a top impact, indicating that AI is used primarily to reduce spend. In higher maturity organizations, the emphasis moves toward improved efficiency, higher engagement, faster feedback, and better outcomes. This suggests that leveraging impactful AI features to enhance the learner experience, rather than focusing mainly on cost reduction, is an important factor in reaching higher levels of program maturity.

Leveraging impactful AI features to enhance the learner experience, rather than focusing mainly on cost reduction, is an important factor in reaching higher levels of program maturity

FIGURE #10

Top 5 impacts of AI usage in language programs, across maturity levels



High maturity organizations consistently see better impact due to wider AI implementation

A personalized learning experience

This year, HR leaders once again listed personalized and one-to-one learning as the most important feature for a language training program, yet this remains among the least widely implemented features. Only 37% of organizations offer each employee a personalized experience based on their departmental and individual needs, as well as learning style. This represents progress from last year, but most programs still rely on standardized content.

Larger enterprises are more likely to have introduced personalization at scale. Among businesses with over 50,000 employees, the proportion that offer a personalized experience for each employee rises to almost half, suggesting that stronger learning infrastructure supports more tailored design.

AI is beginning to close this gap for organizations that use it effectively. Among organizations with very high maturity, 58% say AI has increased personalization and 61% report that it enables faster, more tailored feedback. These figures drop to 30% and 33% respectively for low maturity programs, suggesting that leveraging AI to deliver individualized learning experiences offers an opportunity for organizations to move further up the maturity scale.

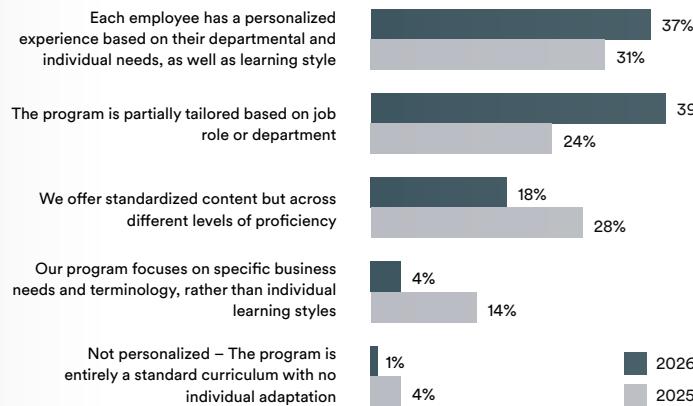
The most important features of a language program



“An effective language training program should offer personalized learning, real-time speaking practice, immediate feedback, multimodal resources and gamification to maintain engagement.”

– Director at a consulting company in Brazil with \$501 million+ annual revenue and 50,000+ employees

FIGURE #11
How businesses personalize their language program



As businesses grow in size, they are more likely to have a personalized experience for each employee when it comes to their language program.

Cultural fluency and advanced program features

Cultural fluency is a new area explored in this year's study, and the results show a clear relationship with maturity. As program maturity increases, organizations are more likely to emphasize global cultural awareness as part of their language training, while lower maturity organizations tend to emphasize local context or a mixed approach.

A similar pattern appears in relation to market expansion. Companies that have entered multiple new international markets in the past year are significantly more likely to prioritize global communication skills, compared to those with no expansion. This suggests that a global orientation in language and culture training supports market readiness.

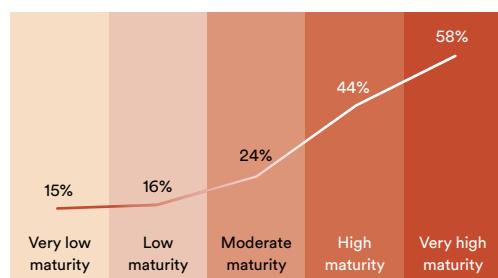
Leveraging more advanced features supports this approach. Mature programs are more likely to incorporate one-to-one tutoring, immersive sessions, and cultural learning. These elements remain less common across the wider sample, which highlights an opportunity for organizations that want to strengthen the real-world relevance of their programs and better support teams entering new markets.

"Key features should include interactive and immersive sessions to practice real-world communication, along with cultural learning to understand context and nuance in language use."

C-level executive at a manufacturing company in UAE with \$1 billion+ annual revenue

FIGURE #12

Companies with language programs that focus mainly on global communication skills and cultural awareness (as opposed to focusing mainly on local communication and culture)



Correlation between focusing on global communication and cultural awareness by change in international markets

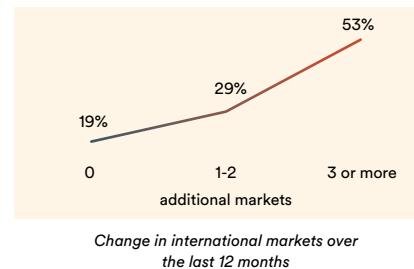
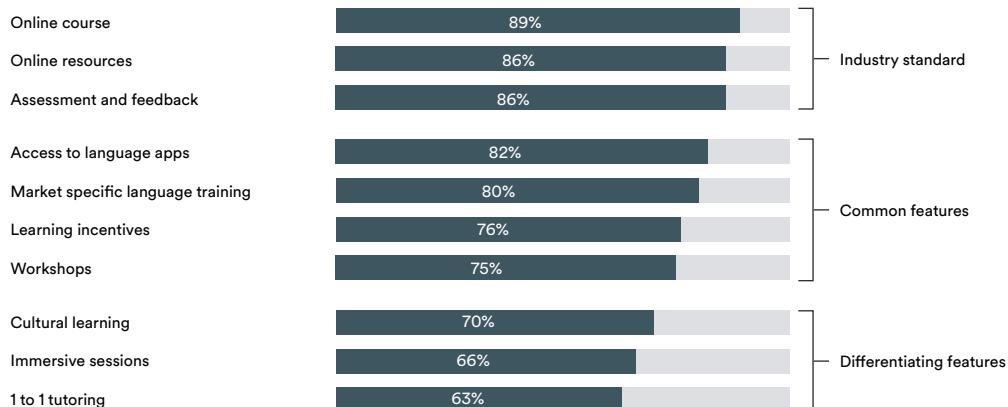


FIGURE #13

What features are offered in your language program?



Review, measurement, and alignment with business goals

This year's results show that many organizations are becoming more deliberate in how they manage and govern their language programs, though important gaps remain. Nearly all businesses measure the effectiveness of their language program, most often through improvements in employee proficiency. Yet fewer than half compare the cost of the program with the benefits. This imbalance suggests that while measurement is becoming routine, organizations still struggle to link language learning to commercial outcomes, such as efficiency, client relations, and reduced errors. Strengthening this connection presents an opportunity for companies to achieve higher program maturity.

FIGURE #14

How businesses measure the effectiveness of their language program

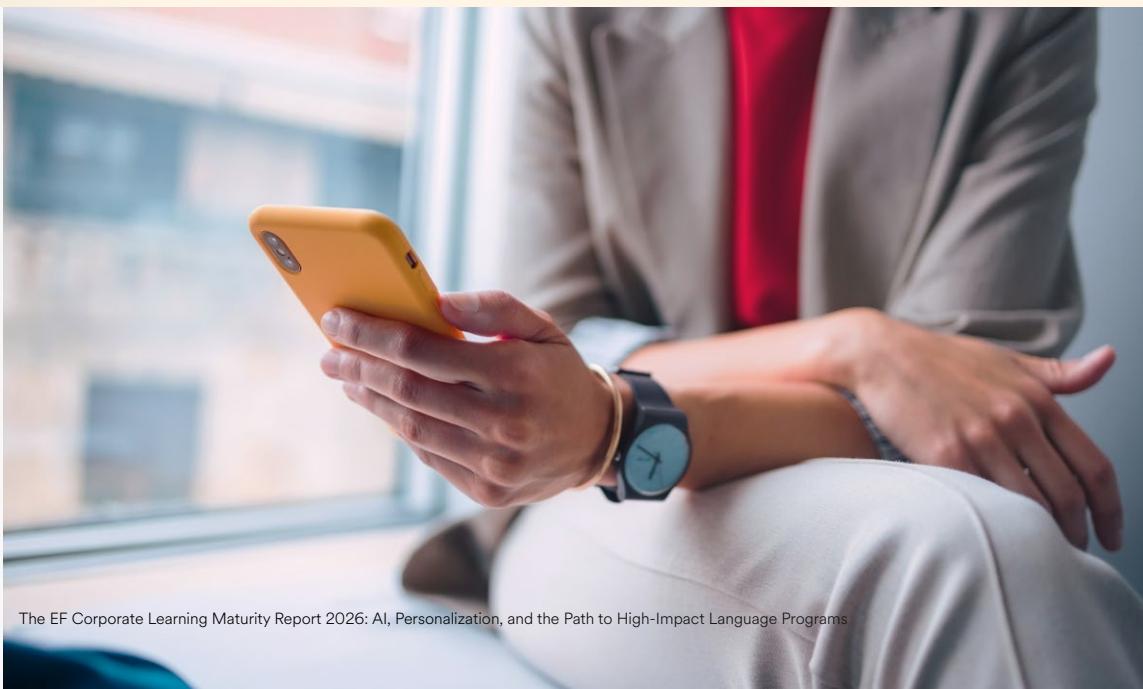
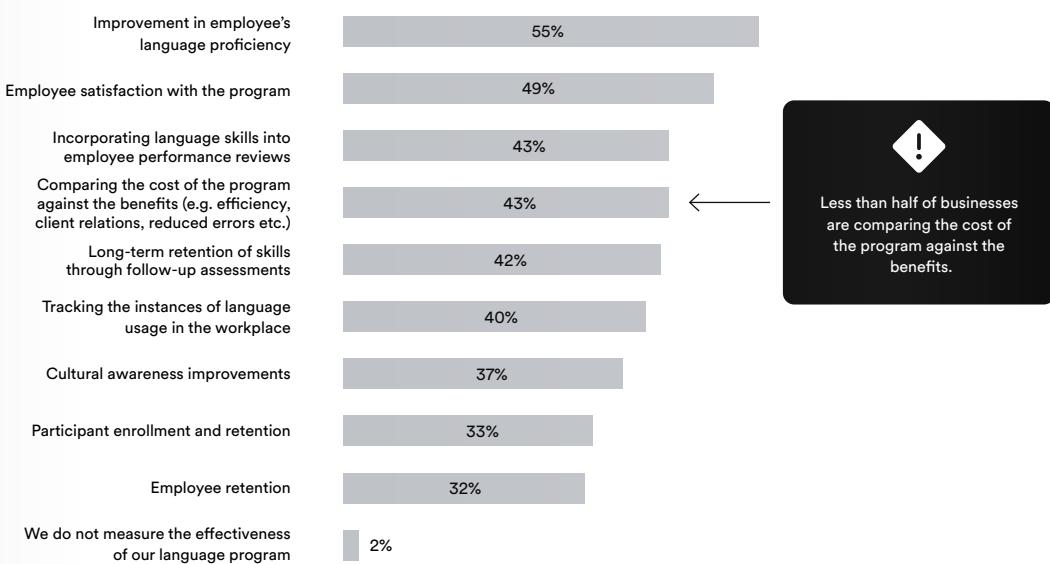
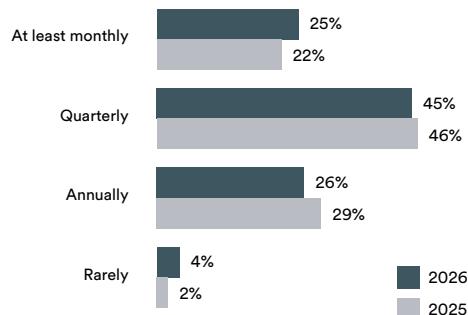
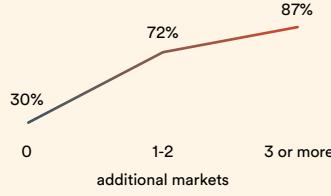


FIGURE #15

How often businesses review their language training program



Showing businesses that review their program at least quarterly by international expansion



Change in international markets over the last 24 months

Review cycles are also evolving. More than two thirds of organizations review their language program at least quarterly, and the share conducting monthly reviews has risen since last year. Businesses that have expanded into multiple new markets over the past two years are especially likely to review their programs frequently, indicating that regular evaluation helps organizations adapt learning strategies to new demands.

Alignment with broader business objectives is also on the rise. The share of companies saying their program is fully or mostly aligned with business objectives has risen from

79% to 84% this year. This shift may be contributing to the overall rise in maturity, as closer alignment ensures that language learning supports commercial priorities rather than sitting apart from them.

We see a similar pattern with employees' performance objectives. Almost half of organizations now classify language learning as a crucial component of performance objectives. Alignment is especially pronounced in large enterprises and fast-growing companies, suggesting that language capability is becoming an essential element of workforce planning.

FIGURE #16

The extent to which a company's language program aligns with its business objectives

2026
2025

NOT ALIGNED AT ALL
The language program operates independently and has no clear ties to our business objectives

1%
2%

MINIMALLY ALIGNED
There is little connection between the language program and our business objectives

3%
5%

SOMEWHAT ALIGNED
The language program has some relevance to our business objectives but is not a major focus

12%
14%

MOSTLY ALIGNED
The language program supports several business objectives but is not fully integrated into the overall strategy

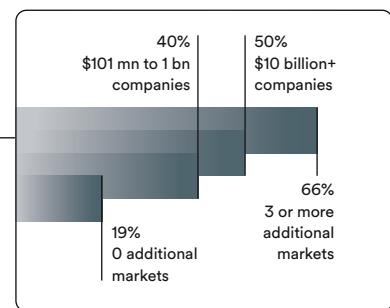
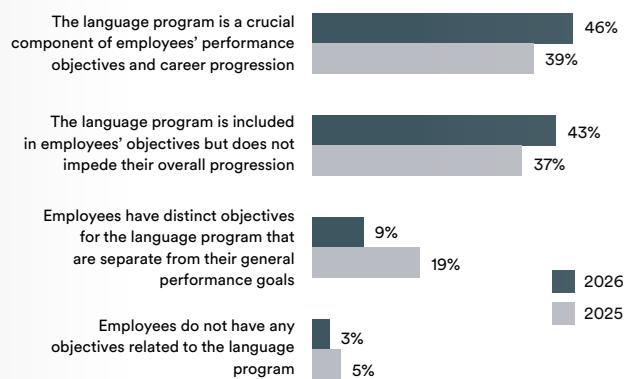
42%
38%

FULLY ALIGNED
The language program is integrated into our business strategy and directly supports key objectives and goals

84% mostly / fully aligned
vs 79% in 2025

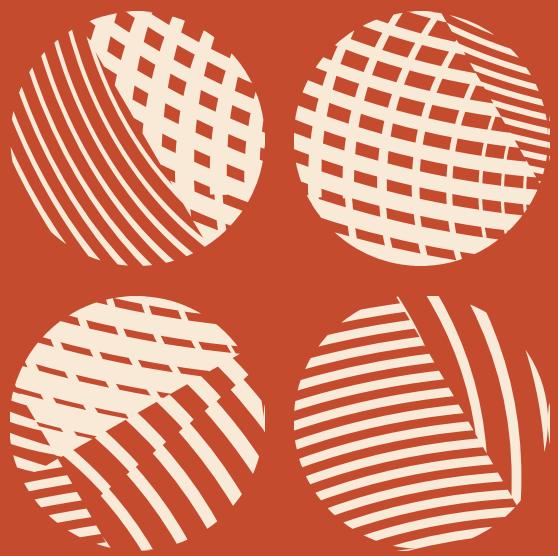
FIGURE #17

The extent to which language programs are linked to performance objectives



! Businesses with higher revenue and those that have expanded to 3 or more markets in the last 2 years are more likely to integrate language programs into employee performance objectives.





Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusion

This year's results confirm the central role that language capability plays in the success of global organizations. It is therefore unsurprising that companies report a growing need for language training across their workforce, with the average proportion of employees requiring language skills to effectively carry out their jobs increasing by 10% relative to 2025.

The 2026 findings reinforce that when organizations invest in developing mature language programs, the business impact extends far beyond improved communication. High-maturity organizations continue to outperform in profitability, market expansion, innovation, and employee engagement – and the gap in profit margins is widening.

This year's study adds clarity on how organizations progress toward maturity, with personalization and AI presenting meaningful opportunities to do so. HR leaders rate personalization highly yet it remains underused, while mature organizations are more likely to apply AI in ways that enhance learning rather than simply reduce cost. Taken together, this year's results highlight that language program maturity is both a marker and a driver of organizational success.

[The greatest impact that language learning has had is] greater skills and competence in the sector compared with other employees with the same profile or career, better ability to communicate, better ability to see and understand the local and global environment, and greater cognitive development to handle more complex tasks.”

Director at a manufacturing company in Mexico with \$1.1 billion+ annual revenue and 5,000+ employees

The proportion of employees requiring language skills to effectively carry out their jobs increased by 10% relative to 2025

“[Language training] has built a bridge that goes straight to the customer's heart. We are no longer a “supplier” speaking through a screen, but a “partner” who can understand and resonate with them in their own language. That sense of trust is something no marketing tactic can replace.”

Senior manager at a technology company in China with \$1.1 billion+ annual revenue



Recommendations: Action points for HR and L&D leaders

To enable HR and L&D leaders to extract the most value out of their language programs, here are the top recommendations based on the findings in this report:

#1

Leverage advanced AI features to strengthen the learning experience

Most organizations now use AI to some extent, but not all of them have implemented it in a way that improves learning outcomes. Focus on AI features that align closely with curriculum goals, such as speech analysis that measures sentence length, use of unique vocabulary, pronunciation accuracy, and progress against the specific learning objectives of each lesson. These capabilities expand practice opportunities and enable feedback at a level of detail that goes beyond what the human ear can capture, particularly in group learning settings. When AI is implemented to enhance the learner experience rather than simply reduce cost, it becomes a meaningful driver of program maturity.

#2

Differentiate your program through personalization

Personalization remains the most valued feature among HR leaders, yet only a minority of organizations offer it in practice. Even modest personalization steps create meaningful progress on the maturity scale. Treat personalization as a standard component of your program design rather than an enhancement reserved for specific learner groups. AI can also be leveraged to offer greater personalization and tailored feedback at scale.

#3

Build cultural fluency with a global foundation

High-maturity organizations place a greater emphasis on global communication skills and cultural awareness, and this focus is closely associated with market expansion. Complementing programs with differentiating features, including one-on-one tutoring, globally focused cultural learning, and workshops, can increase the real-world relevance of learning and build intercultural awareness to complement linguistic skills.

#4

Align language training with business strategy and performance goals

Organizations that tie their language programs to business objectives and employee performance planning consistently report stronger commercial outcomes. To maximize the value of language training, integrate it into business strategy to ensure it directly supports key objectives and goals, as well as employees' performance objectives and career progression.

#5

Strengthen review cycles and ROI metrics

Frequent review is a hallmark of higher maturity. Aim for at least quarterly reviews of performance against strategic needs. Fewer than half of organizations compare the cost of the program against the benefits, such as efficiency, client relations, and reduced errors. This represents an opportunity to develop a clearer business case for investment and continuous improvement.

About this report

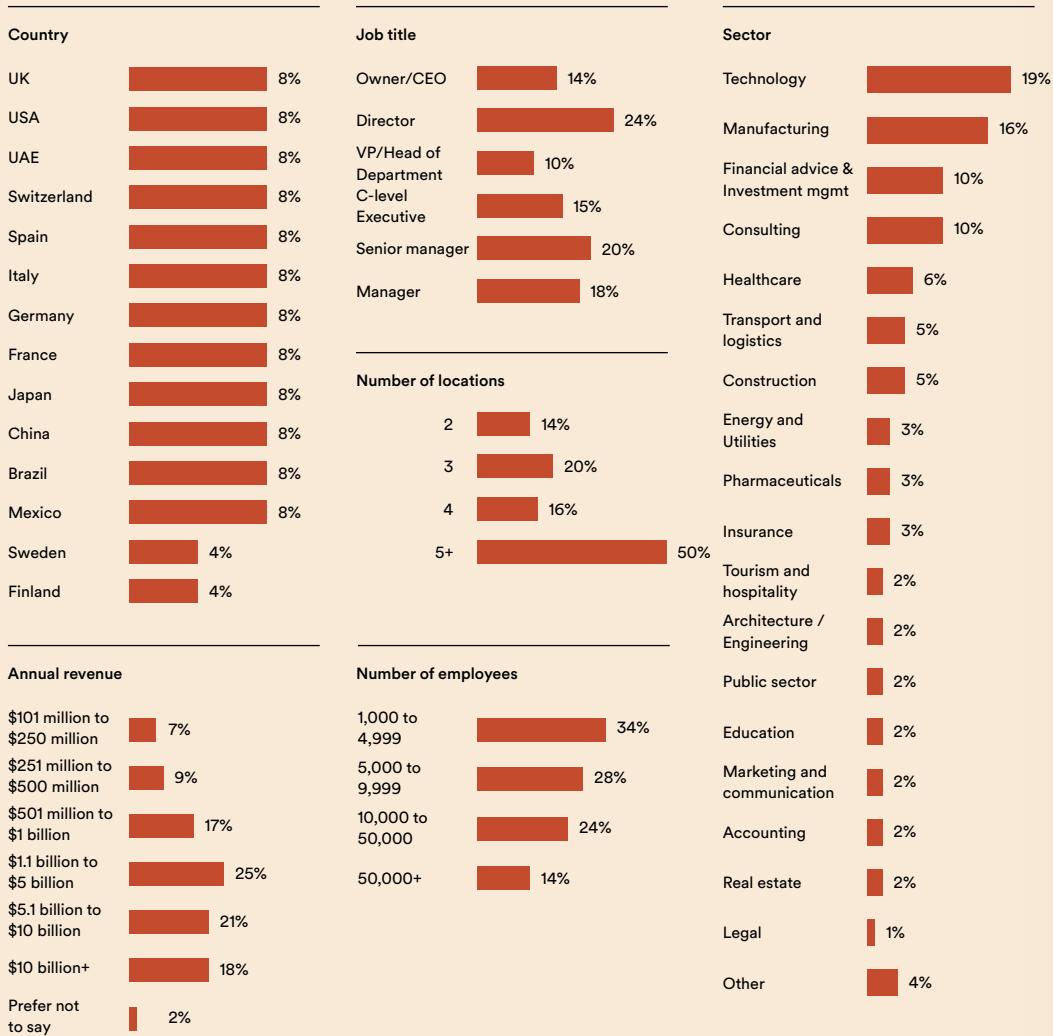
In the fall of 2025, EF Corporate Learning conducted a survey of 1,300 L&D and HR decision-makers and influencers within international businesses of more than 1,000 employees. 66% of the organizations surveyed employ over 5,000 staff and 81% have an annual revenue of over \$500 million. 63% of respondents are in senior leadership positions, and 100% of companies in the survey offer some form of language training to their employees.

This report builds on the first edition of the EF Corporate Learning's Maturity Report, published in early 2025. The goal of this year's research was to validate and deepen the findings

from last year's maturity model; to track year-on-year changes in business outcomes associated with language program maturity; and to expand the scope of analysis to examine areas that have grown in strategic importance, including AI adoption, personalization, cultural fluency, and innovation.

The sample covered a range of industry sectors, with particular focus on the Technology, Manufacturing, Professional Services, and Healthcare sectors. The research was carried out in Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Nordics, Spain, Switzerland, UAE, the UK, and the US.

Respondent demographics



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