



What Are the Key English Language Skills Needed for Working in Israel's High-Tech Sector?

8200 Alumni Association

When Israeli high-tech companies are asked what the most important skill for their employees is, the first answer is: English. In a longitudinal study of employees in Israel's high-tech sector conducted by the Aaron Institute, it was found that nearly all of them studied English at the highest level (five units) in high school, and many have near-native English proficiency. As a result, the Israeli government decided to promote "High-Tech Matriculation" studies, which include five units in English, alongside five units in mathematics, physics, and/or computer science. The government also decided to add an extra weekly English class to all new excellence programs it is establishing in middle schools.

However, the prevailing feeling is that the five-unit English curriculum is not sufficient for the needs of high-tech companies. The Perlmutter Committee to Increase Human Capital in High-Tech even recommended emphasizing English-speaking skills, which are not adequately addressed in high school. In light of this, the foundation approached the 8200 Alumni Association to carry out an in-depth study of the specific English language skills required for high-tech in Israel, based on the types of companies and roles. The research team was also tasked with examining international standards in the field and comparing them to Israel's English curriculum. The team reviewed documents from Israel and abroad, conducted surveys, and interviewed teachers, education experts, and employees and managers from the high-tech industry.

Main findings

1. The Israeli high-tech sector places great importance on advanced English language skills. The most important skill for Israeli high-tech is the ability to read and write emails and professional materials in English, followed by listening comprehension and speaking skills for viewing or delivering presentations.
2. There is no significant difference between types of companies (start-ups, development centers, full-scale companies), but there are notable differences between job types: growth roles require high-level speaking skills and listening comprehension, while research and development roles focus more on reading and writing skills.
3. There is a difficulty in finding candidates in Israel for high-tech positions who have a sufficient level of proficiency in English. As a result, many high-tech companies are outsourcing jobs to English-speaking countries or to countries with skilled workers who have strong English language capabilities.
4. Unlike European countries, Israel's high-tech industry does not use international standards for assessing English proficiency (such as CEFR), and most are not familiar with them. Candidate screening for jobs relies solely on the personal experience of the interviewer, without reference to these standards.
5. English language education in the Israeli school system starts in third grade and continues through twelfth grade. In 2021, 43% of high school graduates took the five-unit English matriculation exam. The Ministry of Education is working to upgrade the English curriculum to align with international standards, with an emphasis on spoken language.

6. There is a severe shortage of English teachers, which has led to a reduced supply and a decline in teaching quality. Due to the demand for English speakers in the labor market, many teachers are leaving the education system. Nearly half of the teachers lack the required qualifications, and some are even embarrassed to speak English in the classroom.
7. Due to the large class sizes and the varying levels of student proficiency, many teachers report that it is very difficult for them to engage in personal conversations with students, leaving many students behind. Teachers noted that speaking and writing skills are the weakest among their students.
8. The research indicates that school-based English education does not adequately prepare students for work in high-tech, as the level is insufficient. The main sources for acquiring English proficiency come from outside the school: the home environment, living abroad, private tutoring, and using technology.
9. The researchers recommend that English education for students in excellence tracks aimed at integration into the high-tech industry should rely primarily on independent learning. AI-based technological tools could significantly contribute to improving English language skills and overcoming learning and teaching gaps in schools.

