

A Global Snapshot of English Proficiency



2020

The state of English around the world

In 2019 English was the most widely spoken language worldwide, counting both native and non-native speakers. It is in regular use by approximately 1.5 billion people – a fifth of the world's population.¹

As English has become a core skill for workplace readiness, businesses and other organizations are seeking effective ways to measure language proficiency and language-learning outcomes.



With the increase of automation and artificial intelligence in the workplace, both to optimize work processes and production efficiencies, individuals in front-line or customer service positions will need to focus on developing skills identified in [Pearson's Future of Skills](#) research study that make us uniquely human, such as originality, fluency of ideas, and most especially communication², in order to compete in a rapidly changing job landscape.

The recently published [Pearson Global Learner Survey](#) indicates that learners believe English is the gateway to working globally from anywhere³. 80-90% of learners in countries like India, China and Brazil view English as an important skill for career progression and achievement.

“

There has been a definitive shift in thinking from Accent Neutralization to Understandability or Intelligibility. The main focus on assessing communication skills is now firmly on the ability to effectively communicate and be understood between both parties. Strong communication skills is a critical underlying factor for First Call Resolution, protecting Brand Image, and driving Net Promotor Scores or Customer Satisfaction.

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- Jon Kaplan, CEO of TDS Global Solutions

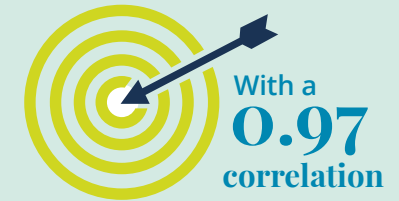
Versant English language assessments

Backed by over 25 years of research, Versant English tests have given corporations competitive advantage to recruit exceptional talent and develop employees' language skills.

Using advanced artificial intelligence (AI) technology and an integrated skills approach to measure communication, Pearson English's Versant tests provide near instant results to accurately and reliably measure candidates' communication skills, no matter where you are in the world.

The Versant suite of tests include:

- **Single skill screening tests of speaking or writing.** Short 20-minute tests used to screen applicants, new hires or students.
- **Four skills screening tests (4 Skills Essential).** Quick tests that use integrated communicative skills to effectively screen candidates' overall English performance.
- **Placement and Professional English 4 skills.** Comprehensive tests that provide a deep analysis of strengths and weaknesses to inform learning and development needs.



(1.00 is perfect), Versant scores are virtually indistinguishable from trained human raters

1.5 million



delivered in 2020

Fast score
turnaround

95%

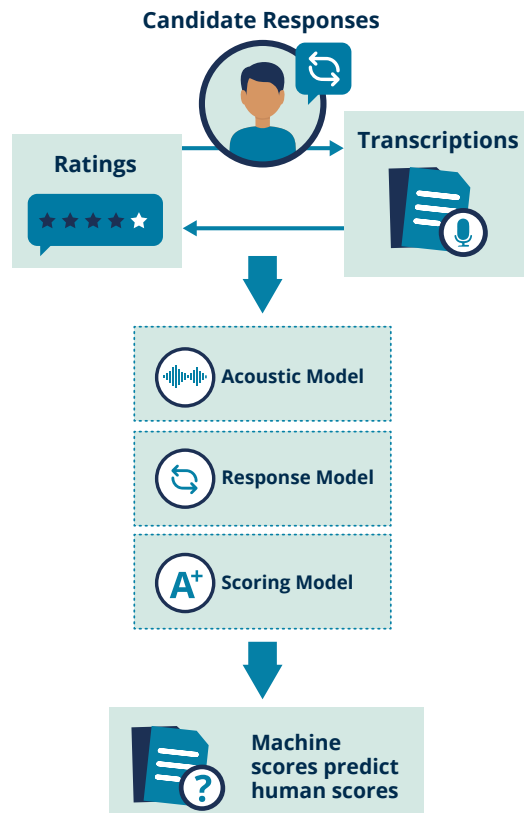
of test results are
available within
5 minutes



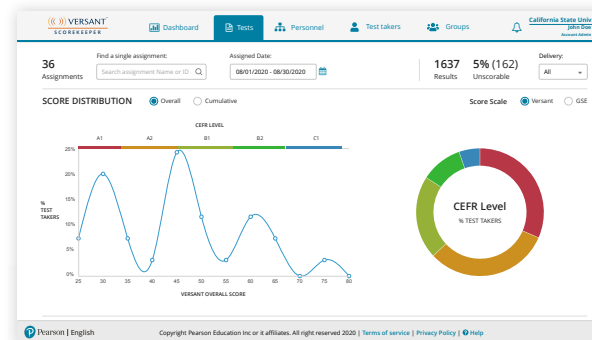
What makes Versant so unique

Versant tests are developed to the highest standards, with proven quality and accuracy. While the technology that powers the test is highly sophisticated, Versant tests are quick to administer and results are easy to understand.

Reliable. AI-based scoring provides consistent, fast and bias-free results, no matter when and where in the world the test is taken.



Flexible. Easy test administration supports large scale recruitment and flexible delivery, including mobile and optional remote monitoring services.



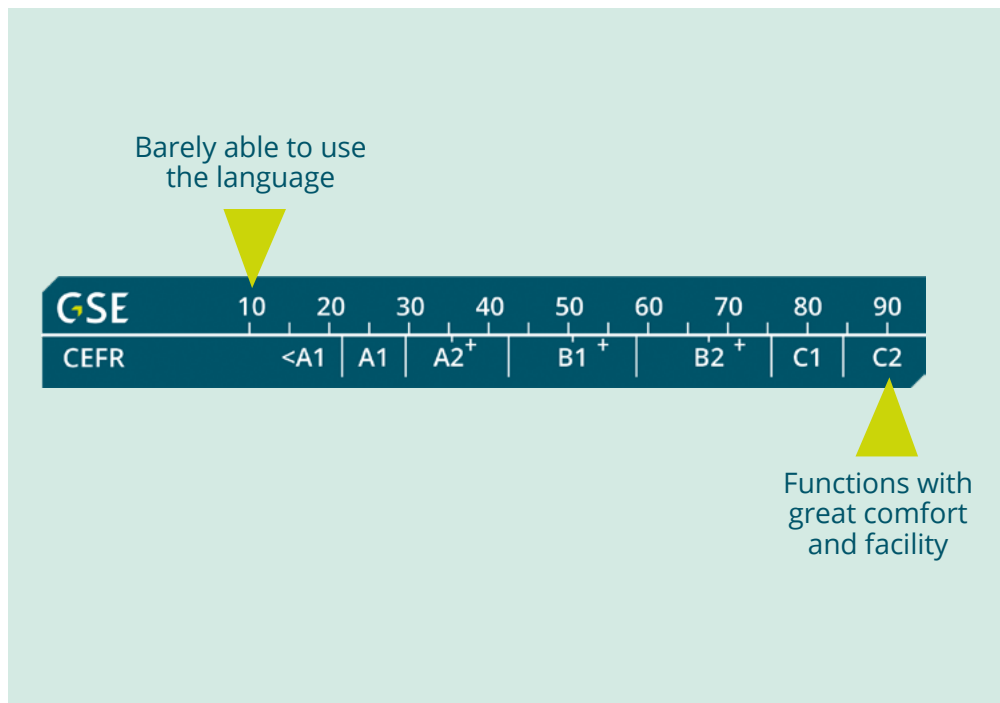
Comprehensive. Rich data and score reports include detailed language capabilities of tests takers that help to inform selection and future learning needs.



The Global Scale of English

Versant test scores are reported on the Global Scale of English (GSE), a scale Pearson developed to provide a global standard for measuring progress in English language acquisition.

- Linked to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)
- Uses the O*Net database to match job profiles with expected English proficiency levels
- 3 points on the GSE equates to 100-150 hours of language instruction
- Scores range from 10-90



What do the scores really represent?

GSE Pearson's Global Scale of English – Learning Objectives for Professional English				
	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Chief Executive Direct and implement the policies, objectives and activities of the organisation to ensure continuing operations, maximum return on investments, and increased productivity	72 Can lead a meeting about a product or service offered by a company or institution	76 Can follow a fast-paced conversation well enough to be able to contribute	74 Can extract key details from quantitative data in complex documents	69 Can write a report summarising business plans and strategies
Accountant Prepare, examine, analyse and report back accounting records, financial statements, or other financial reports to assess accuracy, completeness, and conformance to reporting and procedural standards	76 Can give a progress report including key milestones and highlighting risks	62 Can understand detailed instructions well enough to be able to follow them	55 Can identify key details in work-related documents	58 Can write a business report using a standard template
Office Clerk Answering correspondence via email, communicating with customers and addressing complaints, maintaining filing, databases and calendars, answering calls and taking messages	51 Can carry out a work-related phone conversation using polite fixed expressions	49 Can understand simple technical instructions for everyday equipment	55 Can identify key details in work-related documents	51 Can write a short report on a work-related task or event
Mechanical Engineer Take readings from dials and meters, devise and assemble components and instructions, discuss changes in design, drafting and methodology with other staff	66 Can give detailed opinions during work-related meetings if provided with sufficient background information	66 Can understand the main ideas of complex technical discussions in their field	62 Can interpret the main message from complex diagrams and visual information	58 Can write a description of a problem with a product or piece of equipment

About the report

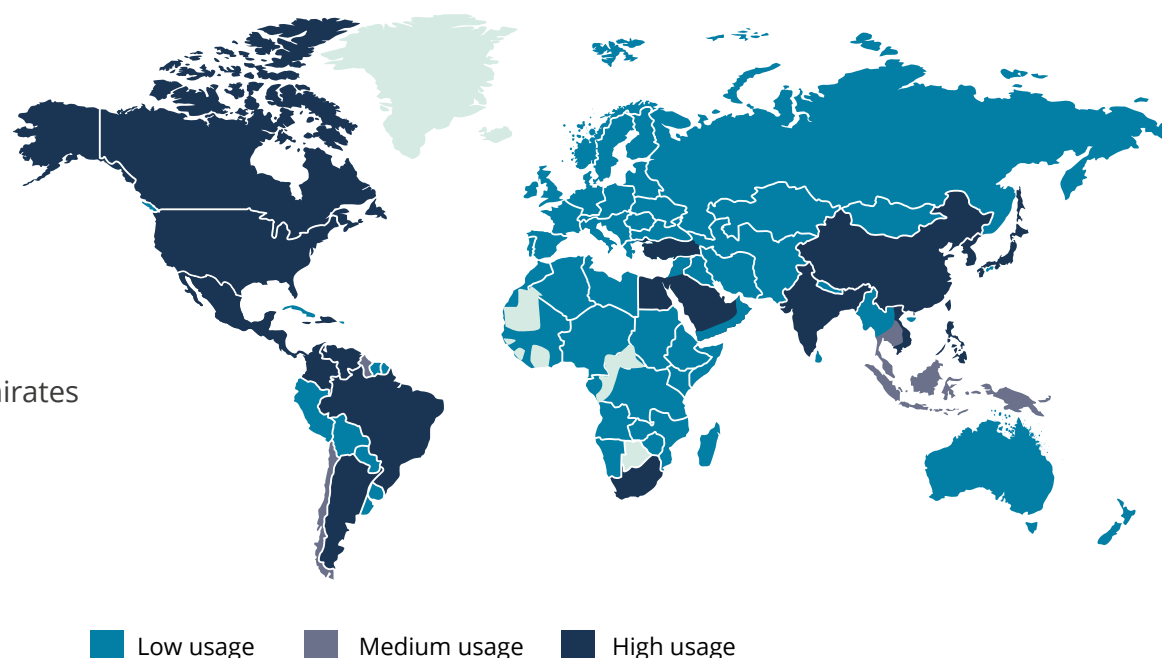
Pearson English researchers analyzed current score data for key Versant language tests as they were used worldwide in 2019. Their findings provide a current snapshot of English speaking and writing levels among Versant test takers worldwide and how these might be changing.

Data in this report shows the level of English of the test taker sample and is not representative of the level of English in each country as a whole.

9 key regions analyzed

When referencing the data, the predominant countries represented in each of the 9 regions are:

- **Africa:** Egypt, Kenya, South Africa
- **Asia Pacific:** China, Japan
- **Central America:** Costa Rica, Guatemala, Jamaica
- **Europe:** France, Germany, Italy
- **Middle East Central Asia:** Jordan, Turkey, United Arab Emirates
- **North America:** Canada, Mexico, United States
- **South America:** Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela
- **South Asia:** India
- **South East Asia:** Philippines



About the test takers

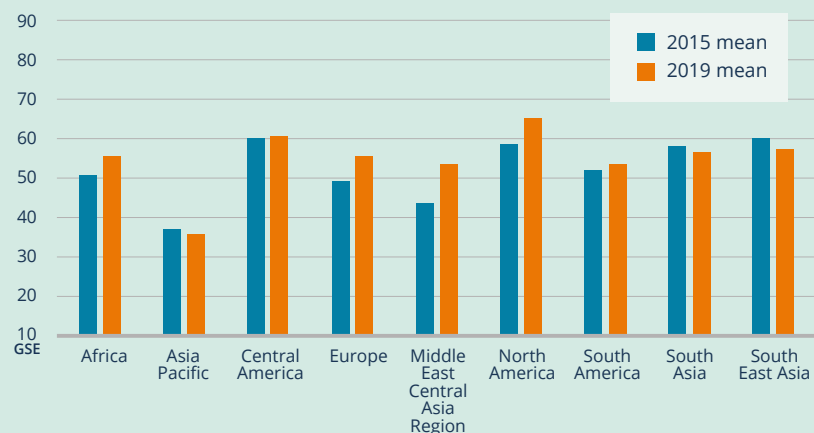
- Seeking employment or placement in a language program
- English is not their first language
- The majority of test takers sampled are in South Asia, South East Asia, and the Americas
- Largest Versant users are corporations, call centers, universities and language training centers

Key global findings

The research conducted by Pearson English's research scientists uncovered 6 key findings. Scores shown below are presented on the Global Scale of English.

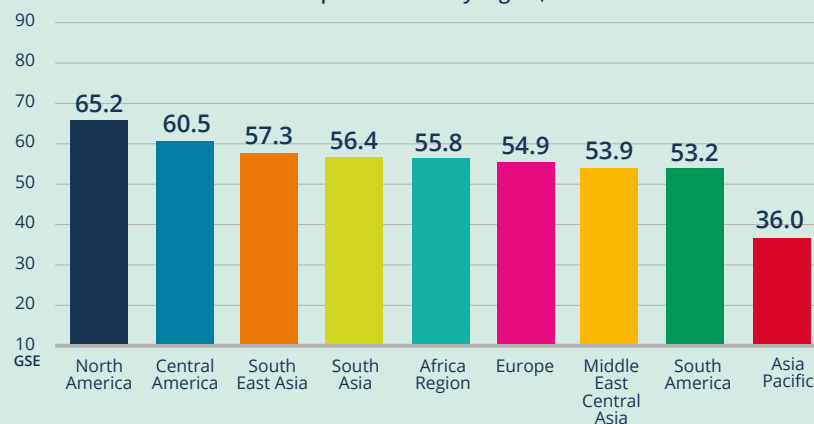
- Overall Versant English Speaking Test (VET) mean performance increased from 2015 to 2019 in 6 of the 9 regions.

VET 2015/2019 mean score comparison by region



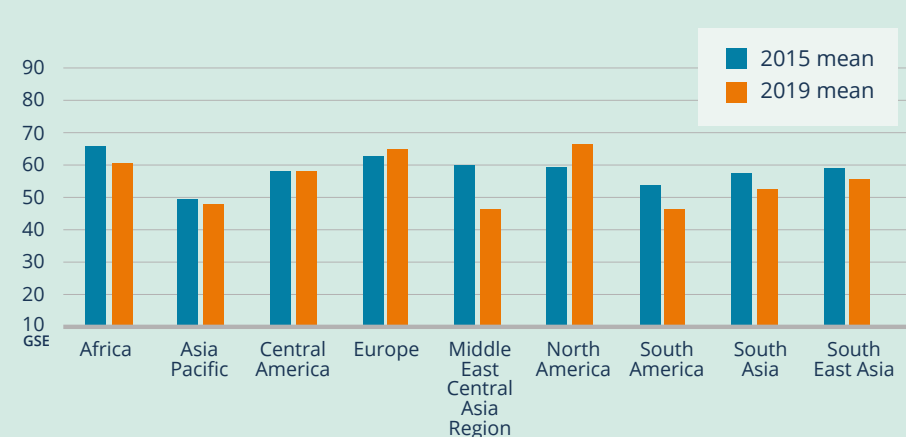
- Test takers in North America and Central America achieved the highest level of speaking skills with a mean of 65.2 and 60.5, respectively.
- The Asia Pacific region, with large numbers of Japanese and Chinese test takers, had the lowest VET mean, 17 points below South America.

VET mean performance by region, 2019



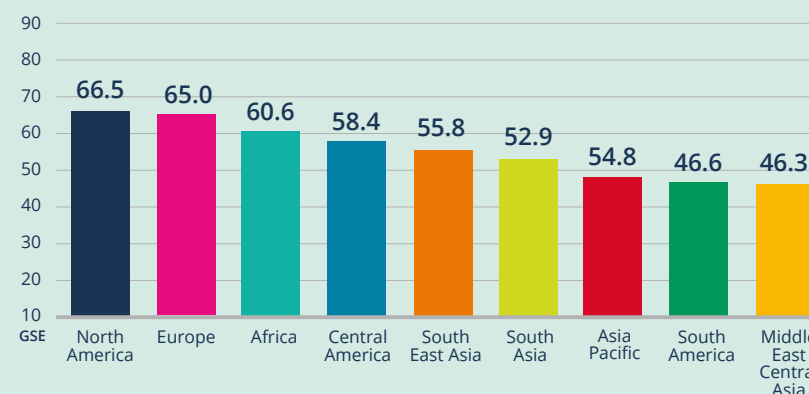
- Overall Versant Writing Test (VWT) mean performance decreased from 2015 to 2019 in 6 of the 9 regions.

VWT 2015/2019 mean score comparison by region



- South East Asia (55.8) and South Asia (52.9), the regions where Versant Writing is most widely used, ranked as 5th and 6th in mean performance.

VWT mean performance by region, 2019



- North America (61.4) and South Asia (56.8) achieved the highest combined overall level of English language proficiency.



Spotlight on *India*

As of 2019, India has employed 4.1 million people, accounting for more than half of the world's IT outsourcing employees⁴. IT/BPO call center companies have been frequent users of Versant tests for voice and chat processes that require communication with native speakers of English.

A recent customer survey in India found 24 different threshold (or passing) scores in use, ranging from 51 to 65 (out of the GSE scale of 10-90) indicating there is range of what might be acceptable English proficiency required for different job roles across industries. The mean threshold score was 58 and the modal threshold score was 55.

Aggregated writing and listening skills are consistently stronger than speaking and reading skills.

Why could this be?


- Test takers coming from Tier 2 cities and more rural areas, where English may not be as widespread and they are unable to practice speaking in English with others. To compensate, these individuals may study harder by joining virtual language exchanges, taking free online writing courses, or listening to English television shows.


Average writing and speaking scores have decreased slightly in the last 5 years.

Why could this be?

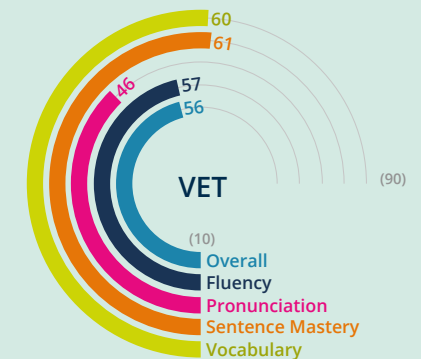
- The IT/BPO industry may no longer be the most desired career path.
- Qualified talent may be harder to find as companies shift recruitment to smaller cities.

**4.1 million
employed,** 
more than half of the world's
IT outsourcing employees

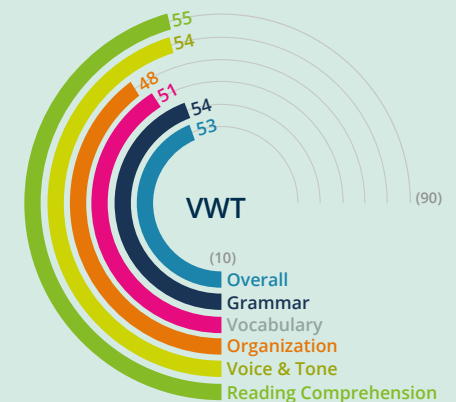
More than
60% 
of operations support US
and UK clients in English⁵

Up to a
**20x
increase** 
of Versant test takers from India
since 2015

Mean performance scores in 2019



Versant English Test



Versant Writing Test



Spotlight on *Philippines*

As one of the global hubs for IT enabled Business Process Management (ITBPM) services, the Philippines employs 1.3 million people as of 2019, with estimates ranging from 7-9% growth annually over the next 5 years.⁶

In a recent customer survey, passing scores for simple customer service positions with routine responses was 55-58 while scores for technical support positions was 70+.

Job role	CEFR B1+	CEFR B2		CEFR B2+ & above		
	GSE 55-58	GSE 59-62	GSE 61-64	GSE 62-65	GSE 65-70	GSE 70+
Simple Customer Service – routine responses with minimal data capture	✓					
Customer Service – more complex longer call		✓				
Customer Service with a cross sell			✓	✓		
High Value Customer Support					✓	✓
Technical Support – 2nd level support or escalation						✓

Why could this be?

- Companies recognize that a higher level of English skills are required for more complex job types.
- The IT & Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP) predicts IT/BPO in the Philippines will shift from low-level skills into mid- and high-level skills⁷, so candidates will need to focus study on English communication and technical skills to be successful in more complex roles.

The Philippines is continuing to stay competitive in the IT outsourcing industry, with increased success in non-voice applications such as email response handling and chat.

Why could this be?

- Companies are able to hire well educated employees at a fraction of the cost compared to the Western world.
- Depth and quality of the English speaking population available is high.
- The Philippines offers many cultural and business similarities to the markets they serve.

5 key industries
using Versant include
healthcare, BPO, finance,
hospitality, IT/telecom

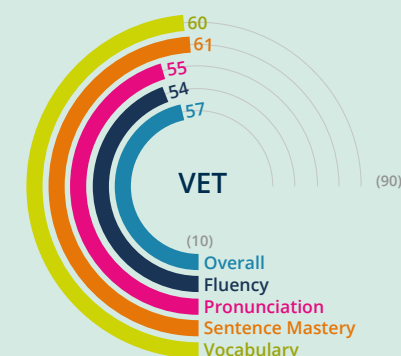


IT/BPO

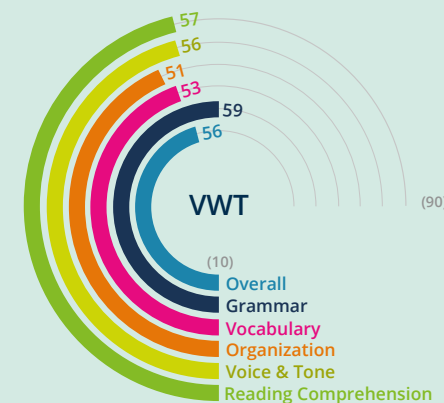
is one of the **leading contributors** to the Philippines' gross domestic product



Mean performance scores in 2019



Versant English Test



Versant Writing Test



Spotlight on *Japan*

Despite 10 years of English language learning in the formal education system, and one of the highest spends in Asia on private language schools, spoken and written production skills are amongst the lowest in the region. Nevertheless, the size of the English language industry itself (estimated at around USD 8.6 billion in 2018 and growing⁸) demonstrates there remains a huge appetite to learn English in Japan.

Versant score trends show spoken and written production skills have remained low over time.

Why could this be?

- A teaching and examination system that is more concerned with the rules of language rather than the application of language.
- Government delays in implementing educational reform towards teaching and measuring communication skills.
- Lack of exposure to real English in the classroom or media.

More companies are demanding higher levels of proficiency in workforce entrants.

Why could this be?

- 82.6% of businesses in Japan believe it's the most important skills requirement, and 67% of them believe that it's lacking.⁹
- Within the next three years, companies in Japan believe that the number of proficient English speakers required will double.⁹
- To stay ahead, companies use Versant during the recruitment process to identify genuine English communication skills and workplace readiness from day one.

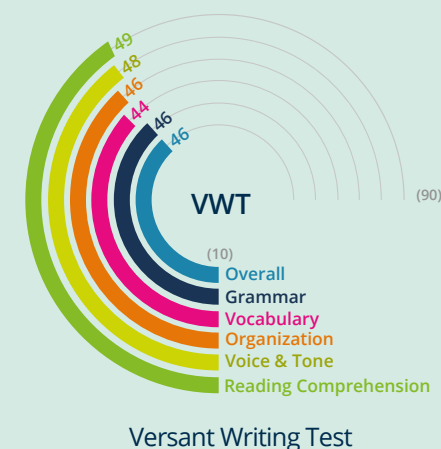
90% + of Versant test takers in this region are **existing employees** in Japanese companies.



More than **70%** of companies are using Versant to **measure the effectiveness** of corporate language training programs and investments.



Mean performance scores in 2019



References

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- ⁹ Nippon. (2019). English Abilities Crucial, but Lacking in Japanese Workplaces. Retrieved from <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00583/english-abilities-crucial-but-lacking-in-japanese-workplaces.html>



To learn more about Versant English language tests, go to
www.VersantTests.com