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English Language Proficiency Shapes Technical Learning and Workplace Readiness in Two Ghanaian Technical Universities

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Case Report

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Abstract

English language proficiency is increasingly important for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), yet limited attention has been given to how language proficiency shapes technical learning and workplace readiness within Ghanaian technical universities. Existing studies largely establish associations between English proficiency and academic or employment outcomes, with limited qualitative evidence explaining students' and lecturers lived experiences and how institutional contexts mediate these relationships. This study examined (i) how English proficiency influences access to and understanding of technical learning, (ii) how it shapes technical communication and perceived workplace readiness, and (iii) how experiences and institutional responses differ across two technical universities in Ghana. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 20 students and 10 lecturers, complemented by classroom observations and institutional evidence. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify patterns within and across cases. Findings show that English proficiency functions as a gateway to technical learning, particularly through students' engagement with specialised terminology, instructional materials, and classroom participation. Participants further identified English as integral to technical communication, professional confidence, employability, and workplace readiness. Cross-case findings revealed common challenges but differences in institutional emphasis, particularly regarding discipline-specific language provision, lecturer support, departmental consistency, and sustainability of interventions. The study implies that Ghanaian technical universities should integrate discipline-specific English and sustained technical communication development into TVET curricula to strengthen the transition from technical learning to effective workplace participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is increasingly recognised as a critical pathway for developing the technical, professional, and employability competencies required by contemporary labour markets. However, technical competence alone may not guarantee successful learning or transition into employment. The ability to understand technical concepts, interpret instructional materials, communicate technical information, write workplace documents, and interact effectively with colleagues and employers is equally important. Consequently, English language proficiency has emerged as an important, yet often underexamined, dimension of TVET learning and workplace preparation, particularly in contexts where English functions as the principal language of instruction and professional communication.

Evidence from different contexts suggests that language proficiency can shape students' academic and vocational trajectories. In Nigeria, Ja'afaru and Agantiem (2026) reported a significant positive association between English language proficiency and academic performance in technical subjects ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), while also identifying moderate to low levels of proficiency among many students. Such findings suggest that difficulties with English may extend beyond language classrooms to students' ability to understand lectures and technical materials. Similarly, research in Malaysia indicates that

English competency is increasingly valued by employers recruiting TVET graduates, reinforcing the need for technical education to develop communication competencies alongside occupational skills (Suhaili & Mohama, 2021). In Ethiopia, Woret and Anshu (2024) identified difficulties among TVET trainees in technical vocabulary, report writing, and oral presentations, raising concerns about whether graduates possess the communication competencies required in professional environments. These concerns are also reflected in the growing interest in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasises occupationally relevant language development and has been proposed as a means of strengthening career readiness in TVET contexts (Adam, 2026).

The relationship between language proficiency and employment extends beyond the educational environment. Arkoudis et al. (2009), for example, demonstrated that English language proficiency can influence employment outcomes and workplace integration, illustrating how language competence may shape individuals' ability to convert educational qualifications into employment opportunities. For TVET graduates, this issue may be particularly consequential because workplace readiness requires not only demonstrating practical competencies but also the ability to follow instructions, explain technical procedures, document activities, collaborate with others, and respond appropriately to workplace demands. Thus, English proficiency may operate as a bridge between the acquisition of technical knowledge in educational institutions and its effective application in occupational settings.

In Ghana, these issues warrant particular attention given the expanding role of technical universities in producing graduates for industry and the broader national objective of developing a skilled and employable workforce. Existing evidence indicates that language-related competencies are relevant to academic performance in Ghanaian TVET settings. Nkrumah (2021), for instance, found that communication skills accounted for a measurable proportion of variation in students' cumulative grade point average, reinforcing the significance of communication within technical education. At the same time, Ghanaian technical universities continue to face broader challenges relating to curriculum relevance, infrastructure, and industry linkages, which may constrain effective preparation for employment (Kwateng & Leong, 2025). Workplace Experience Learning has also produced uneven outcomes, with some students developing communication and other soft skills while others experience placement mismatches and inadequate mentorship (Folson & Awuah, 2026). These conditions suggest that workplace readiness is shaped by an interaction between technical education, communication competencies, institutional practices, and exposure to authentic workplace environments.

Despite this emerging evidence, an important research gap remains. Much of the existing literature approaches English proficiency through quantitative measures of academic performance, employability, or language competence, providing limited insight into how language proficiency is actually experienced within technical learning environments and how it translates into students' perceptions of workplace readiness. Moreover, limited attention has been given to the perspectives of both students and lecturers and to how institutional contexts may shape these experiences. Consequently, there is insufficient contextual understanding of the mechanisms through which English proficiency facilitates or constrains

technical learning, technical communication, and preparation for employment within Ghanaian technical universities.

This study addresses this gap through a qualitative multiple-case study of two technical universities in Ghana. Its novelty lies in moving beyond the measurement of language proficiency to examine the lived educational experiences, challenges, and institutional responses surrounding English-mediated technical education. Specifically, the study explores how students and lecturers experience the influence of English language proficiency on the learning and understanding of technical and vocational subjects; examines how proficiency shapes students' acquisition of technical communication skills and perceived workplace readiness; and compares experiences, challenges, and institutional responses across the two universities. By bringing these dimensions together, the study seeks to demonstrate how language, technical learning, and employability intersect within Ghana's TVET landscape and provide evidence for more contextually responsive approaches to preparing technically competent and workplace-ready graduates.

2. Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983) and the Employability/Work Readiness Perspective (Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006). The integration of these perspectives provides a theoretically informed basis for examining how English language proficiency may shape students' engagement with technical learning, development of technical communication competencies, and perceived preparedness for workplace participation. While Communicative Competence Theory explains the linguistic and communicative resources required to access, construct, and convey knowledge effectively, the employability perspective provides a framework for understanding how such competencies contribute to graduates' ability to function effectively in employment contexts.

2.1.1 Communicative Competence Theory

Communicative Competence Theory emerged partly in response to the limitations of purely structural conceptions of language competence. Whereas Chomsky's conception primarily emphasised knowledge of linguistic rules, Hymes (1972) argued that effective communication also requires knowledge of how language is appropriately used within particular social contexts. Building on this perspective, Canale and Swain (1980) developed a framework for second-language communicative competence that was subsequently elaborated by Canale (1983). The framework conceptualises communicative competence as comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence concerns knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, and the formal rules required to construct meaningful utterances. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to social context, participants, purpose, and communicative norms.

Discourse competence involves the ability to connect individual utterances into coherent and meaningful spoken or written communication, while strategic competence concerns the verbal and non-verbal strategies individuals employ to compensate for communication difficulties and maintain effective interaction (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983).

This multidimensional conceptualisation is particularly relevant to TVET because technical learning involves considerably more than acquiring practical skills. Students must understand specialised vocabulary, interpret technical instructions, follow lectures and demonstrations, engage in classroom and workshop discussions, prepare reports, explain technical procedures, and communicate with lecturers and peers. Consequently, English language proficiency can influence students' ability to access and demonstrate technical knowledge. A student may possess the practical capacity to perform a task but experience difficulty communicating how or why the task should be performed because of limitations in vocabulary, discourse organisation, or strategic communication.

The theory therefore provides an appropriate lens for examining the first objective of this study, which seeks to explore how students and lecturers experience the influence of English language proficiency on the learning and understanding of technical and vocational subjects. It also informs the second objective by recognising that workplace communication requires students to mobilise language appropriately rather than merely demonstrate knowledge of grammatical rules. In the context of this study, communicative competence is consequently understood as the capacity to use English effectively to access technical knowledge, participate in technical learning, communicate technical information, and manage communication demands in educational and occupational settings.

Importantly, the theory also accommodates the possibility that language difficulties may not operate uniformly across students or institutions. Students may develop different strategies for managing communication challenges, while lecturers and institutions may employ different pedagogical and support mechanisms. This makes Communicative Competence Theory particularly compatible with the qualitative multiple-case design of the present study, which seeks to understand participants' experiences and the strategies through which communication challenges are negotiated rather than statistically measuring proficiency levels alone.

2.2 Employability and Work Readiness Perspective

The second theoretical foundation is provided by Yorke's (2006) conceptualisation of employability and the associated framework developed by Yorke and Knight (2006). Yorke (2006) defines employability in terms of the achievements, skills, understandings, and personal attributes that enhance graduates' likelihood of obtaining employment and succeeding in their chosen occupations. This perspective challenges narrow conceptualisations of employability that equate workplace readiness with possession of a qualification or a collection of transferable skills. Instead, employability is viewed as multidimensional and closely connected to the quality of students' learning and their capacity to apply what they have learned in appropriate contexts.

The perspective is particularly relevant to contemporary TVET because workplace readiness requires graduates to integrate technical knowledge with communication, interpersonal, problem-solving, and professional competencies. Oliver (2015) further extends this understanding by emphasising graduates' capacity to identify, acquire, adapt, and continually develop skills relevant to meaningful employment. From this perspective, workplace readiness is not a fixed attribute acquired at graduation; rather, it involves the capacity to apply and continually develop competencies in response to changing occupational demands.

Communication therefore constitutes an important dimension of workplace readiness. Technical graduates are expected to communicate with supervisors, colleagues, clients, and other professionals; interpret workplace instructions; prepare technical documentation; participate in meetings; explain technical processes; and communicate problems and solutions. Consequently, limitations in English language proficiency may potentially constrain students' ability to translate technical knowledge into effective workplace performance. Conversely, stronger communicative capabilities may enhance students' confidence and perceived ability to participate effectively in professional environments.

The employability perspective therefore provides the theoretical basis for examining the second objective of this study: how English language proficiency shapes students' acquisition of technical communication skills and their perceived workplace readiness. It also provides a basis for interpreting students' experiences of workplace preparation, including whether their technical university education adequately equips them with the linguistic and communicative resources required beyond the classroom.

Taken together, the two perspectives position English language proficiency not simply as a general academic skill but as a functional component of technical education and workplace preparation. Communicative Competence Theory draws attention to students' ability to understand and use English appropriately in technical learning environments, while the employability perspective highlights the importance of translating these competencies into effective occupational participation.

The integrated framework consequently enables this study to investigate three interconnected dimensions: (i) how English proficiency shapes access to and understanding of technical learning; (ii) how it contributes to the development of technical communication and perceived workplace readiness; and (iii) how these experiences and institutional responses vary between technical universities. This theoretical integration is particularly valuable because it shifts the discussion from whether English proficiency is important to how and under what institutional conditions language competence becomes consequential for technical learning and transition to work.

2. Empirical Literature Review

2.1 English Language Proficiency, Access to and Understanding of Technical Learning

English language proficiency has increasingly been recognised as an important component of successful participation in technical and vocational education because English often functions simultaneously as the language of instruction, technical documentation, assessment, and professional communication. Unlike general academic learning, technical education requires students to engage with specialised terminology, procedural instructions, manuals, diagrams, lectures, laboratory or workshop explanations, and written technical materials. Consequently, difficulties with English may create barriers to accessing technical knowledge even where students possess the cognitive and practical capacity to learn the underlying concepts.

Empirical evidence supports this relationship across different educational and occupational contexts. Mollah et al. (2025), for example, found that English proficiency influenced students' ability to understand mathematical concepts, with stronger language abilities associated with better conceptual reasoning, retention of abstract ideas, and performance in modelling tasks. Their findings suggest that language can influence learning indirectly by affecting how learners interpret and process disciplinary knowledge. This is particularly important in technical education, where mathematical reasoning and abstract concepts are frequently embedded within practical and occupational applications. Similarly, Ja'afaru and Agantiem (2026) reported a strong positive relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance in technical subjects ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), while observing that many students demonstrated moderate to low proficiency. Their findings provide quantitative evidence of the academic consequences of language competence but also raise an important question concerning how students actually experience language-related difficulties while learning technical subjects.

Evidence from multilingual technical-learning environments further illustrates the role of English as a gateway to specialised knowledge. Issamba (2026), studying mining engineering students, found that learners perceived English as important for professional advancement and access to specialised technical information, although confidence in technical communication differed according to students' exposure and learning opportunities. This finding is particularly significant because it suggests that proficiency is not merely an individual attribute; its educational consequences may depend on the opportunities students have to encounter and practise technical English. Similarly, Iyappan et al. (2025) describe English as an important lingua franca within technology-related environments, facilitating communication across multinational teams and access to contemporary technological information.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate a broad empirical convergence: English proficiency can facilitate access to disciplinary knowledge, comprehension of technical materials, and participation in technical learning. However, the existing evidence is predominantly concerned with relationships between measured proficiency and academic outcomes or with students' general perceptions of English. Less is known about the specific experiences through which language proficiency enables or constrains learning—for example, how students interpret technical terminology, follow practical instructions, participate in classroom discussions, understand demonstrations, or communicate what they have learned. This limitation is particularly important in Ghanaian technical universities, where English

occupies a central position in formal education, but students enter higher education with diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds.

The qualitative dimension is therefore important because statistical associations alone cannot adequately explain how language becomes consequential within technical learning environments. Understanding these processes requires attention to students' and lecturers' accounts of everyday learning, including the strategies students use when they encounter unfamiliar terminology and the pedagogical strategies lecturers employ to make technical knowledge accessible.

2.2 English Language Proficiency, Technical Communication and Workplace Readiness

The significance of English proficiency extends beyond classroom learning because TVET institutions are expected to produce graduates who can apply their competencies effectively in occupational environments. Contemporary workplaces increasingly require the integration of technical knowledge with communication, teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal, and professional skills. Consequently, workplace readiness cannot be understood solely in terms of whether graduates possess occupationally specific technical competencies.

Research on technical communication supports this broader conception of workplace preparation. Suojanen (2019), for example, demonstrates how project-based approaches involving industry partnerships can develop communication, teamwork, project-management, and other workplace competencies while connecting academic learning with professional practice. Such approaches are particularly relevant to TVET because they create opportunities for students to practise communicating technical information within contexts resembling actual occupational environments. Similarly, Slattery and Cleary (2013) emphasise the importance of aligning technical communication education with industry expectations and using practical assignments to develop competencies that are relevant to professional practice.

Evidence from competency-based technical education further reinforces this argument. Beltrán et al. (2026) found that technical education programmes can equip graduates with both discipline-specific competencies and transferable skills, although communication remains an area requiring continued attention. Mane and Kolekar (2026) similarly argue that workplace readiness encompasses emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, adaptability, and experiential learning in addition to technical expertise. These findings challenge a narrow understanding of TVET employability in which technical competence is assumed to be sufficient for successful labour-market participation.

The importance of English becomes particularly apparent in workplaces where communication occurs across professional, organisational, and national boundaries. Yusof et al. (2017) argue that TVET graduates may struggle to market themselves to potential employers when they possess technical competencies but lack sufficient English communication skills. Their findings suggest that communication competence can influence graduates' ability to present themselves professionally and compete for employment, particularly in international labour markets. Ting et al. (2017) identify three

major reasons for the importance of English in employment: its use as an organisational working language, its relevance to occupations where English is directly required, and its importance for subsequent promotion and career development. Similarly, Saleh and Murtaza (2018) report that employers value English proficiency as an important graduate attribute within an increasingly globalised economy.

Workplace communication itself encompasses a broad range of activities. Powzi and Yamat (2017) identify communication as one of the most important skills required in contemporary employment, while Mikkola and Valo (2019) highlight activities such as information sharing, problem-solving, decision-making, workplace discussions, and relationship building as important forms of organisational communication. For newly graduated TVET students, therefore, workplace communication may involve writing professional emails, preparing reports, giving presentations, explaining technical procedures, responding to supervisors, communicating with customers, and collaborating with colleagues.

Despite this evidence, an important limitation persists. Much of the literature establishes that communication and English proficiency are valued by employers, but comparatively less attention has been given to how students themselves understand the relationship between English proficiency, technical communication, and their readiness for work. Moreover, workplace readiness is frequently assessed through employability skills frameworks rather than explored through students' and lecturers' lived experiences. A qualitative approach can therefore reveal whether students perceive English as enhancing their confidence and professional identity, whether language difficulties constrain their ability to demonstrate technical competence, and how they anticipate using English in actual employment settings.

2.3 Institutional Contexts, Challenges and Responses in Technical Universities

The relationship between English proficiency, technical learning, and workplace readiness does not occur independently of institutional conditions. Universities differ in curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, lecturer practices, opportunities for experiential learning, industry engagement, student support systems, and institutional priorities. Such differences may shape how students encounter and overcome language-related challenges.

Existing research on technical universities provides evidence that institutional experiences and responses vary considerably across contexts. Wu (2012), for instance, found differences in students' perceptions of leadership between general and technical universities in Taiwan and demonstrated that active learning and co-curricular activities could influence student development across institutional settings. Although not specifically concerned with English proficiency, the study illustrates the broader point that institutional structures and learning practices influence students' educational experiences.

Comparative research among European technical universities similarly demonstrates institutional variation. Benner (2020), examining KTH, DTU, and EPFL, found that institutions configured organisational tasks and roles differently, suggesting that institutional effectiveness cannot simply be

attributed to a single universal model. Larsen et al. (2020) further demonstrate that technical universities respond to external pressures through institution-specific processes shaped by organisational identity. These findings are important for the present study because they caution against assuming that students in different technical universities encounter identical learning conditions or institutional responses.

Research on educational interventions also demonstrates the importance of institutional strategies. Boni and Pérez-Foguet (2008), examining development education initiatives in Spanish technical universities, identified diverse institutional responses, including ethical codes, faculty training groups, specialised courses, and student mobility programmes. Although these interventions address broader educational concerns rather than English proficiency specifically, they demonstrate how technical universities can respond institutionally to emerging educational and professional demands.

The Ghanaian context provides further justification for examining institutional differences. Kwateng and Leong (2025) identify persistent challenges within Ghanaian technical universities, including curriculum limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and weak industry partnerships, which may affect the effectiveness of workforce preparation. Folson and Awuah (2026) similarly report mixed experiences with Workplace Experience Learning, with some students benefiting from communication and time-management development while others encounter placement mismatches and insufficient mentorship. These findings suggest that students' preparation for employment may depend not only on what they learn in the classroom but also on the institutional mechanisms through which technical and employability competencies are developed.

Nevertheless, there remains limited empirical evidence on how technical universities specifically respond to English-related challenges in technical education. Existing studies provide valuable evidence about institutional variation, curriculum relevance, workplace learning, and employability, but the intersection between language proficiency and institutional responses remains insufficiently explored. In particular, little is known about whether lecturers adapt instructional practices, whether universities provide targeted language support, and how students themselves navigate language barriers within different institutional environments.

2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

The empirical literature collectively establishes three important propositions. First, English proficiency can influence students' access to and understanding of technical knowledge, particularly where technical learning depends heavily on specialised vocabulary, written materials, lectures, and complex instructions. Second, communication competence represents an important bridge between technical education and workplace readiness because graduates must be able to communicate technical knowledge and interact effectively within professional environments. Third, these experiences are likely to be shaped by institutional contexts, including teaching practices, curriculum arrangements, industry exposure, and support mechanisms.

However, the literature remains fragmented. Studies examining academic outcomes tend to quantify the association between English proficiency and performance, while employability studies often examine communication as one component of a broader skills framework. Research on technical universities, meanwhile, has paid greater attention to institutional organisation, curriculum, industry engagement, and workplace learning than to the role of language in shaping these processes. The critical gap, therefore, is not simply whether English proficiency matters, but how it is experienced as part of technical learning, how it translates into technical communication and perceived workplace readiness, and how universities respond to language-related challenges.

This study addresses this gap through a qualitative multiple-case study of two technical universities in Ghana. Rather than treating English proficiency as an isolated measurable attribute, it examines the experiences of students and lecturers within their actual technical learning environments. Specifically, the study explores how English proficiency influences the learning and understanding of technical and vocational subjects; how it shapes technical communication skills and perceived workplace readiness; and how these experiences, challenges, and institutional responses differ across the two universities. By connecting language proficiency, technical learning, and workplace preparation within a comparative institutional framework, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of an underexplored dimension of TVET quality and graduate employability in Ghana.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore how English language proficiency shapes technical learning, technical communication, and perceived workplace readiness within Ghanaian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) contexts. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, interpretations, and meanings concerning the use of English in technical learning and workplace preparation rather than quantify relationships between predetermined variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The multiple-case study design enabled an in-depth examination of these experiences within two institutional settings and facilitated systematic comparison of similarities and differences across cases (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in two public technical universities in Ghana, purposively selected because of their strong orientation towards technical and vocational education and the linguistic diversity of their student populations. The two institutions constituted the cases of the study, while students and lecturers constituted the principal units of analysis. Including participants from engineering, applied sciences, and business-related programmes provided variation in disciplinary experiences of English-mediated technical education.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to identify individuals with direct and relevant experience of English-medium technical education and workplace preparation (Patton, 2015). The sample comprised 30 participants: 20 students and 10 lecturers drawn from the two technical universities. The students were recruited from Levels 200–400 to capture experiences across different stages of university education, including students with relatively limited and more extensive exposure to technical coursework and workplace preparation. Lecturers were selected based on their experience teaching technical, professional, or communication-related courses and their direct engagement with students in English-medium instructional settings.

Participant recruitment proceeded iteratively, with sampling decisions informed by the emerging data and the relevance of participants' experiences to the research questions. Data collection continued until meaning saturation was achieved, whereby additional interviews generated limited new insights relevant to the developing themes (Guest et al., 2006). The emphasis on information-rich cases was consistent with the interpretive purpose of qualitative inquiry rather than statistical representativeness.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected over six weeks using semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and relevant institutional documents. The use of multiple sources enabled methodological triangulation and provided opportunities to examine both participants' reported experiences and language practices as they occurred within instructional settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and lecturers using flexible interview guides developed around the three study objectives. Student interviews explored experiences of understanding technical concepts and instructional materials in English, difficulties with technical vocabulary and academic communication, experiences of communicating technical knowledge, and perceptions of how English proficiency influenced their preparedness for employment. Lecturer interviews focused on students' language-related learning difficulties, the relationship between English proficiency and technical learning, observed communication challenges, pedagogical responses, and institutional mechanisms for supporting students' language and workplace communication development. The semi-structured format enabled consistency across participants while allowing participants to introduce experiences and issues that were not anticipated in the interview protocol.

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to complement interview accounts and examine language use within authentic learning environments. Observational attention focused on lecturer explanations, students' participation in discussions, use of technical terminology, requests for clarification, lecturer adaptations, and other observable practices through which language influenced technical learning. Field notes were recorded systematically during and immediately after observations.

Relevant institutional documents, where accessible, were also examined to contextualise participant accounts. These included curriculum materials, course outlines, communication-skills provisions, student-support information, and documents relating to workplace preparation. Documentary evidence

was used primarily to understand institutional approaches rather than as a substitute for participants' perspectives.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and supplemented by field notes. Interviews were conducted in settings that provided reasonable privacy and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. The analysis involved iterative familiarisation with the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials; generation of initial codes; development of candidate themes; review and refinement of themes; definition and naming of final themes; and production of the analytic narrative. Coding was both deductive and inductive. Deductive codes were informed by the study objectives and theoretical framework, particularly communicative competence and employability/work readiness, while inductive coding allowed unexpected patterns and meanings to emerge from participants' accounts.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, within-case analysis was undertaken to develop a detailed understanding of experiences and institutional responses within each university. Second, cross-case analysis compared the two cases to identify convergent and divergent patterns in students' and lecturers' experiences, language-related challenges, pedagogical practices, and institutional responses. This approach ensured that the comparative dimension of the multiple-case design was incorporated into the interpretation rather than treating the two institutions simply as a combined sample.

Observational and documentary evidence were integrated with interview data during interpretation. Where participant accounts could be corroborated or contextualised through observations or institutional documents, these sources were considered together. Divergent evidence was retained rather than automatically reconciled, as differences between reported and observed practices could provide analytically important insights into the institutional experience of English-mediated technical education.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness and methodological rigour of the study. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation across interviews, classroom observations, and institutional documents, as well as member checking in which participants were given opportunities to clarify or confirm the interpretation of their accounts. Dependability was supported through a systematic record of sampling decisions, data-collection procedures, coding development, and analytical decisions maintained as an audit trail. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive engagement with the researchers' assumptions and interpretations throughout data collection and analysis. Transferability was supported through sufficiently detailed descriptions of the institutional settings, participants, and research processes, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to comparable TVET contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Given the use of reflexive thematic analysis, the researchers treated interpretation as an active and situated process rather than assuming that themes simply emerged objectively from the data. Reflexive notes were maintained throughout the research process to critically examine how researchers' assumptions concerning English proficiency, technical education, and employability could influence data interpretation.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the **Ethics Review Committee of Takoradi Technical University, Ghana**, with approval reference number **TTU/ERC/26/088**. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing identifying information from the data and reporting. All information collected was used solely for academic purposes and stored securely.

4. Results

Analysis produced seven interconnected themes showing how English proficiency shapes TVET learning and workplace readiness. Brief illustrative evidence is given where relevant.

4. 1. Theme 1: English Language Proficiency as a gateway to Technical Learning

The findings indicate that English language proficiency constitutes an important gateway to students' engagement with technical learning. Across the student accounts, English was closely intertwined with the acquisition, interpretation, and expression of technical knowledge. Participants particularly identified four interconnected dimensions: technical terminology and comprehension, accessibility of instructional materials, language-related learning barriers, and participation in classroom learning. Rather than viewing English as an additional academic requirement, students described it as embedded within the technical learning process itself.

4.1.1 Technical Terminology and Comprehension

A prominent finding was the importance of understanding specialised English terminology for making sense of technical concepts. Students described situations in which they could understand the practical dimension of a lesson but struggled to articulate the underlying technical knowledge because of unfamiliar terminology. Student 1 explained:

“When the lecturer uses too many technical English words, I understand the practical demonstration, but I struggle to explain what I have learned.”

This account illustrates an important distinction between understanding a practical procedure and being able to linguistically demonstrate that understanding. Similarly, Student 13 stated,

“If I understand the technical vocabulary, I can follow the lesson much more easily,”

while Student 19 noted that knowledge of English technical terms helped them communicate what they were doing during practical sessions.

“Knowing the technical terms in English helps me communicate what I am doing during practical sessions.”

These accounts suggest that technical vocabulary functions as more than a linguistic resource; it provides students with the terminology through which technical knowledge is organised and communicated. This finding is consistent with Mollah et al. (2025), who found that English proficiency can influence students' understanding of disciplinary concepts, and with Ja'afaru and Agantiem (2026), who reported a strong positive relationship between English proficiency and performance in technical subjects. The present findings extend this evidence by showing how this relationship may operate at the classroom level. Students' accounts suggest that difficulties with English can create a disconnect between practical competence and the ability to understand or articulate the conceptual knowledge accompanying that competence.

This finding also resonates with Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). In particular, grammatical and discourse competence provide students with resources for interpreting and producing meaningful technical communication. Where students lack familiarity with specialised terminology, their ability to access technical explanations and express technical understanding may consequently be constrained.

4.1.2 **Technical Terminology and Comprehension**

Students also identified English as a critical factor in their interaction with textbooks, manuals, and other instructional resources. Student 2 reported:

“Some of the textbooks are written in English that is difficult for me, so I have to read the same paragraph several times.”

Similarly, Student 7 explained:

“Most of the manuals we use are in English, and when I do not understand the instructions, it affects my practical work.”

These accounts demonstrate that language-related challenges can extend beyond classroom interaction into students' independent learning and practical activities. Importantly, the difficulty is not simply that students encounter English-language materials; rather, the complexity of the language used in technical materials can affect their ability to extract and apply relevant information.

Student 15 described using online videos as an alternative source of explanation because some resources presented technical concepts in English that were easier to understand.

“I use videos on the internet because some of them explain technical concepts in English that is easier for me to understand.”

This suggests that students actively develop compensatory strategies when formal instructional materials become linguistically inaccessible. Such strategies indicate agency among learners, but they may also point to limitations in the accessibility of existing instructional resources.

The finding is particularly significant within TVET because technical learning frequently requires students to consult manuals, equipment specifications, operating instructions, and other forms of technical documentation. Thus, English proficiency potentially influences not only what students understand during formal instruction but also their capacity for independent and practical learning.

4.1.3 English as Source of Learning Barriers

A further pattern concerned the extent to which language difficulties could make technical learning appear more difficult than the underlying technical content. Student 5 observed:

“The difficult English terms make some technical topics look harder than they actually are.”

Student 17 similarly stated:

“When assignments require a lot of writing in English, I spend more time thinking about the language than the technical problem.”

These accounts suggest that linguistic demands may compete with students' attention to the technical task itself. Rather than concentrating exclusively on solving a technical problem, students may simultaneously have to process unfamiliar language, interpret terminology, and formulate an appropriate English response. This can create an additional cognitive and communicative burden within technical learning.

Student 9 provided a related example, explaining that uncertainty about the meaning of an English-language question could lead to an answer that differed from what the lecturer intended.

“When I am not sure about the English meaning of a question, I sometimes give an answer that is different from what the lecturer is asking.”

The issue, therefore, may not necessarily reflect a lack of technical knowledge; instead, it may arise from difficulties interpreting the linguistic representation of the technical task. The findings provide qualitative depth to the quantitative evidence reported by Ja'afaru and Agantiem (2026). While their study established a statistical association between English proficiency and technical academic performance, the present accounts illustrate possible mechanisms underlying that association: difficulties interpreting technical questions, processing instructional language, and expressing technical knowledge may constrain students' demonstration of what they know.

4.1.4 English Proficiency and Classroom Participation

The data further indicate that English proficiency affects students' willingness to participate in technical learning activities. Student 4 explained:

“Sometimes I know the answer, but because I cannot express it well in English, I do not contribute during class.”

Student 12 similarly reported being afraid of reading aloud because of concerns about pronunciation,

“I am afraid of reading aloud in class because I worry that my pronunciation will be wrong.”

while Student 18 indicated that participation increased when lecturers created an environment in which students did not feel embarrassed about their English.

“I participate more when the lecturer allows us to ask questions without making us feel embarrassed about our English.”

This finding is particularly important because it demonstrates that the consequences of English proficiency are not restricted to comprehension. Language can also influence students' visibility and participation as learners. Students may possess relevant technical knowledge but remain silent because they lack confidence in expressing it in English. Consequently, language proficiency may affect opportunities for students to ask questions, demonstrate understanding, receive feedback, and engage collaboratively with peers.

The finding reinforces the sociolinguistic and strategic dimensions of Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). Effective communication requires not only knowledge of language structures but also the ability to use language appropriately and strategically within particular social situations. In this study, the classroom represents such a communicative environment, where students' willingness to participate appears partly dependent on their confidence in using English and on the communicative climate created by lecturers.

Synthesis of the Findings

Hence, the student accounts portray English proficiency as a cross-cutting condition of technical learning rather than a peripheral academic skill. The findings show that language influences at least four interconnected processes: students' ability to understand technical terminology and concepts, their access to instructional materials, their ability to demonstrate technical knowledge, and their willingness to participate in classroom activities.

Importantly, the accounts also demonstrate that practical competence does not always translate into communicative competence. Some students reported being able to follow practical demonstrations or understand the substance of a technical task while struggling to explain their knowledge in English. This distinction is theoretically significant because it suggests that technical competence and language

competence may develop unevenly. A student may therefore be technically capable while experiencing difficulty demonstrating that competence through English-mediated academic and professional communication.

The findings consequently provide an important foundation for the next theme of the study: how English proficiency shapes students' technical communication capabilities and their perceptions of workplace readiness. If students experience English as a gateway to understanding and articulating technical knowledge at university, the same linguistic competencies may become important when they are required to communicate that knowledge in occupational environments.

4.2 Theme 2: English Language Proficiency and the Development of Workplace Communication Competence

The findings indicate that students perceive English language proficiency as an important component of workplace communication competence and readiness. Across the interviews, four interconnected dimensions emerged: technical communication, communication confidence, professional interaction, and employability/workplace readiness. Participants consistently distinguished between possessing technical knowledge and being able to communicate that knowledge effectively in professional environments. This distinction suggests that, from students' perspectives, technical competence alone may be insufficient for effective workplace participation when graduates are unable to articulate their knowledge, understand instructions, report problems, or interact confidently with workplace actors.

4.2.1 English Proficiency and Technical Communication

A dominant pattern in the data was the perceived importance of English for communicating technical information in workplace settings. Students recognised that technical knowledge must be expressed clearly to supervisors, colleagues, and other workplace actors. Student 2 captured this distinction particularly clearly:

“I may know how to operate the equipment, but if I cannot explain the problem in English, it becomes difficult to communicate with my supervisor.”

This account suggests that workplace effectiveness involves more than the possession of practical knowledge. The graduate must also be able to externalise that knowledge through appropriate technical language. Similarly, Student 6 reported that during industrial attachment, most instructions from supervisors were communicated in English, demonstrating that English proficiency becomes practically consequential when students transition from university-based learning to workplace environments.

The importance of technical vocabulary was also evident in Student 14's observation:

“I feel more confident when I know the English names of the tools, equipment and processes I am working with.”

This finding extends the first theme, where students described technical terminology as a gateway to understanding classroom content. In the workplace context, however, terminology assumes an additional function: it becomes a means through which graduates identify, describe, explain, and communicate technical activities. Student 19 similarly identified report and email writing as necessary components of professional communication.

These findings are consistent with Suojanen (2019) and Slattery and Cleary (2013), who emphasise the importance of practical technical communication experiences in connecting educational preparation with workplace expectations. They also support the argument of Yusof et al. (2017) that technical skills alone may not be sufficient when graduates must present themselves and communicate their competencies to employers and other professional actors.

From the perspective of Communicative Competence Theory, these findings illustrate that workplace communication requires more than grammatical knowledge. Students must possess the ability to select and use appropriate technical vocabulary, organise information coherently, and communicate effectively according to the demands of particular workplace situations (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). English proficiency therefore appears to function as an enabling resource through which technical competence becomes communicable and actionable.

4.2.2 English Proficiency and Communication Confidence

A second prominent dimension concerned the relationship between English proficiency and students' confidence in professional communication. Student 1 stated:

"At the workplace, you have to explain what you are doing clearly, so knowing English gives me confidence when talking to supervisors."

Similarly, Student 7 observed:

"When I communicate confidently, people at the workplace take me more seriously."

These accounts indicate that students associate English proficiency not only with the ability to communicate but also with how they perceive themselves and believe they are perceived by others within professional environments. Conversely, limited confidence may discourage students from participating in workplace communication. Student 11 described knowing what they wanted to communicate during presentations but struggling to find the appropriate English words, while Student 18 reported that confidence in English enabled participation in workplace meetings rather than remaining silent.

This pattern is significant because it demonstrates that the consequences of language proficiency may extend beyond the transmission of information to affect students' participatory agency. A technically knowledgeable graduate who lacks confidence in communicating in English may be less likely to ask

questions, contribute to meetings, clarify instructions, or raise concerns. Such silence could have implications for both professional development and workplace learning.

The finding also reinforces the relevance of the strategic and sociolinguistic dimensions of Communicative Competence Theory. Effective communication involves not simply knowing what to say but having the capacity and confidence to deploy language appropriately within particular social and professional interactions. The students' accounts suggest that confidence can therefore serve as an important link between language proficiency and actual workplace participation.

4.2.3 English Proficiency and Professional Interaction

The participants further emphasised the importance of English for interacting with different categories of workplace actors. Student 4 acknowledged:

"I sometimes hesitate to speak to professionals because I am worried that my English is not good enough."

By contrast, Student 16 described English as enabling interaction with experienced workers and facilitating questions when something was not understood. Student 9 extended this concern beyond the immediate Ghanaian workplace, noting:

"I want to improve my English because I may have to work with people from different countries."

These accounts demonstrate that students perceive workplace communication as inherently relational. English proficiency enables them to seek clarification, learn from experienced colleagues, interact with professionals, and potentially operate within increasingly internationalised work environments.

This finding aligns with Ting et al. (2017), who identified English as important in workplaces where it functions as an organisational working language and in occupations requiring communication with customers and other professional stakeholders. It also resonates with Iyappan et al. (2025), who highlight the role of English in facilitating communication across multinational technical environments.

Importantly, the participants did not frame professional interaction solely in terms of speaking correctly. Rather, they associated effective communication with confidence, participation, clarification, relationship-building, and the ability to function as a member of a professional team. This broader interpretation is consistent with contemporary understandings of workplace communication as involving information exchange, collaborative problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal interaction (Mikkola & Valo, 2019).

4.2.4 English Proficiency and Employability

Another significant pattern was the perceived relationship between English proficiency and employability. Students repeatedly referred to communication as an important factor in job interviews, employer perceptions, customer interaction, and future career opportunities. Student 3 stated:

“Good English will help me during interviews because employers expect you to communicate professionally.”

Student 10 similarly explained:

“During an interview, knowing the technical work is important, but you must also be able to explain yourself.”

Student 17 reinforced this perception:

“I believe employers look at how you speak and present yourself, not only the certificate you have.”

These accounts suggest that students conceptualise employability as involving the ability to present and communicate one's technical competence, rather than simply possessing formal qualifications. Student 13 further linked communication with future opportunities, noting that the ability to communicate effectively with customers could create additional career opportunities.

This finding closely corresponds with the Employability/Work Readiness perspective advanced by Yorke (2006) and Yorke and Knight (2006), which conceptualises employability as encompassing skills, understandings, and personal attributes that enable graduates not only to obtain employment but also to function effectively within their occupations. From this perspective, English proficiency becomes relevant because it supports graduates' capacity to demonstrate and apply their technical knowledge in employment contexts.

The findings also support Yusof et al. (2017), who argue that TVET graduates may struggle to market themselves when they possess technical competencies but lack effective English communication skills. Similarly, Saleh and Murtaza (2018) identify English proficiency as an increasingly valued graduate attribute within a globalised economy. However, the present findings contribute an important qualitative dimension by showing how students themselves understand the employability value of English. Rather than perceiving English as simply an employer requirement, students associate it with confidence, professional presentation, interview performance, interaction with customers, and access to future opportunities.

4.2.5 English as a Complement to Technical Competence

Perhaps the most conceptually significant finding is that participants did not position English proficiency as a substitute for technical competence. Instead, they viewed the two as complementary dimensions of workplace readiness. Student 5 explicitly stated:

“Technical skills alone are not enough; you also need to communicate your ideas clearly at work.”

This perspective is even more clearly articulated by Student 20:

“My technical training prepares me for the job, but English communication prepares me to work effectively with other people.”

These accounts capture the central finding of this theme: technical training prepares students to perform occupational tasks, whereas communication competence enables them to communicate, coordinate, and participate effectively while performing those tasks.

Student 15 similarly highlighted the functional consequences of communication, explaining:

“Good communication can prevent mistakes because you have to understand instructions before carrying out a task.”

Thus, English proficiency is perceived not simply as contributing to employability at the point of recruitment but as potentially influencing everyday workplace effectiveness and safety, particularly where tasks depend on accurately understanding instructions and reporting problems.

This finding is consistent with Beltrán et al. (2026), who argue that effective technical education requires the integration of discipline-specific competencies with transferable skills. It also reinforces Mane and Kolekar's (2026) broader conceptualisation of workplace readiness as incorporating communication, interpersonal competencies, adaptability, and experiential learning alongside technical expertise.

4.2.6 Synthesis of the Findings

The findings demonstrate that students perceive English language proficiency as an important translational competence between technical knowledge and workplace performance. Four interconnected functions emerged. First, English enables students to communicate technical information through explanations, reports, emails, and workplace instructions. Second, proficiency enhances communication confidence, allowing students to participate more actively in professional interactions. Third, English facilitates professional interaction with supervisors, colleagues, customers, and experienced workers. Finally, these capabilities contribute to perceived employability and workplace readiness, particularly during job interviews and subsequent career development.

The findings therefore importantly extend the first theme. Whereas English was previously experienced as a gateway to acquiring technical knowledge, participants now describe it as a means of converting technical knowledge into workplace action and professional participation.

4.3 Theme 3 Institutional Contexts and Responses to English Language Challenges

The findings indicate that students perceive institutional practices and lecturer-level interventions as important in determining how effectively English-related challenges are managed within technical learning environments. Although participants acknowledged the availability of some forms of language support, their accounts revealed concerns regarding the adequacy, accessibility, consistency, and technical relevance of such support. Three interconnected dimensions were particularly evident: context-responsive teaching practices, institutional support mechanisms, and gaps in the consistency and effectiveness of institutional responses.

4.3.1 Context-Responsive Teaching Practices

Students consistently highlighted the role of lecturers in mediating the linguistic demands of technical learning. Rather than viewing language difficulties solely as deficiencies located within students, participants described how lecturers' instructional practices could either facilitate or constrain understanding. Student 2 observed:

"Some lecturers explain difficult English terms in simpler language, and that helps us understand the lesson."

Similarly, Student 5 stated:

"When lecturers use examples from our practical work to teach English, it becomes easier for us to understand."

These accounts suggest that pedagogical adaptation can reduce the linguistic barriers associated with technical content. Simplifying terminology, connecting explanations to practical activities, and contextualising unfamiliar concepts within students' disciplinary experiences appear to make technical English more accessible.

Student 9 reinforced this finding:

"Lecturers who allow us to ask questions and explain things again make learning easier for students who struggle with English."

The importance of repetition and opportunities for clarification is noteworthy because it positions the lecturer as an important mediator between the language of technical instruction and students' existing linguistic resources. From the perspective of Communicative Competence Theory, such practices potentially create opportunities for students to develop not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to interpret and negotiate meaning within discipline-specific communicative contexts.

These findings also extend Theme 1. Students previously described unfamiliar terminology and complex explanations as barriers to technical learning. The present findings demonstrate that these barriers are not necessarily fixed. The way technical knowledge is communicated can influence whether students experience English as an obstacle or as an accessible medium of learning. This suggests that the educational consequences of English proficiency are partly shaped by pedagogical responsiveness.

4.3.2 Need for Technically Relevant Language Support

Although students acknowledged existing support, several accounts indicated that they considered current provision insufficiently aligned with the realities of technical education. Student 1 explained:

"The school provides some support, but I think we need more English lessons that are directly related to our technical courses."

This statement points to a distinction between general English instruction and discipline-specific language development. Students appear to value language support that directly addresses the terminology, communication practices, writing conventions, and interactional demands associated with their particular technical fields.

Student 7 similarly emphasised the need for greater opportunities to practise presentations and technical report writing:

"More practice in presentations and technical report writing would help us prepare for the workplace."

This finding is particularly important because it connects institutional language support directly to workplace readiness. Students are not simply requesting additional general English classes; they are calling for opportunities to practise forms of communication that resemble those required in professional environments.

This evidence supports the rationale underlying English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where language instruction is designed around the communicative demands of particular disciplines and occupational contexts. It also reinforces the employability perspective underpinning this study: workplace readiness requires students to acquire competencies that can be transferred and applied in authentic professional settings.

4.3.3 Accessibility and Consistency of Institutional Support

A further concern was the uneven accessibility and consistency of language support. Student 6 reported:

"There are times when I need help with English, but I do not know where to go for that support."

This suggests that the existence of support mechanisms does not necessarily mean that students can identify, access, or utilise them when needed. The problem may therefore involve not only the availability of support but also its visibility and integration into students' everyday academic experiences.

Student 8 similarly noted:

"The language support available to students is useful, but it should be more consistent across departments."

This account introduces an important institutional dimension: variation in students' experiences of support. The finding suggests that language assistance may depend partly on the department, lecturer, or particular learning environment in which students find themselves. Student 3 expressed a similar concern:

"The support we receive depends on the lecturer. Some are patient when students struggle with English, while others move on quickly."

Together, these accounts indicate that students may experience English support as person-dependent rather than systematically institutionalised. Where individual lecturers provide additional explanation and opportunities for clarification, students may experience greater inclusion in technical learning. Conversely, where such adaptations are absent, language difficulties may remain unresolved. This finding is analytically significant for a multiple-case study because it provides a basis for examining whether institutional approaches to English support are embedded in formal structures or largely dependent on individual lecturer practices.

4.3.4 Perceived Gaps in Institutional Intervention

Participants also identified areas where they believed institutional interventions could be strengthened. Student 4 argued:

"I think the institution should organize additional communication classes for students in technical programmes."

Student 10 went further by suggesting:

"I think the institution should assess our communication skills as part of our technical training."

These accounts indicate that students perceive communication competence as sufficiently important to warrant explicit institutional recognition within technical education, rather than treating English as a peripheral or separate academic requirement.

The proposal to assess communication skills alongside technical training is particularly noteworthy. It reflects the participants' understanding that technical competence involves not only performing tasks but also communicating technical knowledge and procedures effectively. Such a perspective is consistent with the Employability/Work Readiness framework, which views graduate preparedness as involving an integrated set of knowledge, skills, and attributes rather than technical qualifications alone (Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006).

The students' recommendations therefore point toward a potentially important curricular implication: technical communication may need to be embedded within technical programmes rather than confined to general communication courses. This could involve discipline-specific report writing, technical presentations, workplace simulations, professional correspondence, and structured opportunities to practise explaining technical procedures.

4.3.5 Synthesis of the Findings

The findings indicate that students perceive English-language challenges as partly dependent on the responsiveness of the institutional and pedagogical environment. Three broad patterns emerge. First, lecturers can reduce language-related barriers through contextualised explanations, simplification of technical terminology, repetition, and opportunities for clarification. Second, students perceive a need for

more discipline-specific language support, particularly in technical presentations and report writing. Third, existing support is perceived as uneven, with accessibility and quality sometimes depending on individual lecturers or departments.

The findings therefore challenge an exclusively deficit-oriented interpretation in which difficulties with English are attributed solely to students' individual proficiency. Instead, they suggest that the relationship between language proficiency and technical learning is institutionally mediated. The same level of language difficulty may produce different educational experiences depending on how lecturers communicate technical concepts and how universities organise language support.

This finding adds an important contextual dimension to the theoretical framework. Communicative competence is not developed solely through individual effort; it is also shaped by the communicative opportunities and pedagogical environments provided by institutions. At the same time, from an employability perspective, the students' call for more technical report writing, presentations, and communication assessment suggests that workplace readiness may be strengthened when language development is integrated directly into technical education.

4.4 Theme 4: Institutional Contexts and Responses to English Language Challenges

The findings indicate that English-related challenges in technical education are shaped not only by students' individual language abilities but also by the pedagogical practices, institutional support mechanisms, and organisational arrangements within technical universities. Evidence from both students and lecturers revealed that lecturers play a critical role in mediating language-related difficulties through simplified explanations, demonstrations, repetition, and opportunities for clarification. At the same time, participants identified limitations in formal language support, uneven integration of English communication across departments, and concerns regarding the sustainability of existing interventions. These findings suggest that institutional responsiveness is an important condition influencing whether English functions as a barrier or an enabling resource in technical learning.

4.4.1 Lecturer-Mediated Responses to English-Related Learning Challenges

Both students and lecturers identified classroom-level pedagogical adaptation as an important mechanism for addressing language-related barriers. Students reported that lecturers who simplified technical terminology, provided additional explanations, and allowed questions made technical content easier to understand. Student 2 explained:

“Some lecturers explain difficult English terms in simpler language, and that helps us understand the lesson.”

This perception was strongly corroborated by Lecturer 2, who stated:

“We often have to simplify our explanations or use demonstrations because some students struggle to understand technical instructions in English.”

The convergence between student and lecturer accounts is significant. It suggests that lecturers actively modify their instructional practices in response to students' linguistic needs rather than relying exclusively on formal language-support structures. Lecturer 7 described a further strategy of repeatedly using technical vocabulary so that students could become familiar with the terminology alongside the practical skills:

"I encourage students to use technical vocabulary repeatedly so that the language becomes familiar alongside the practical skills."

These practices indicate that language development is occurring, at least to some extent, within technical instruction itself. This is theoretically consistent with Communicative Competence Theory, which conceptualises effective communication as involving the ability to use language appropriately and meaningfully within particular contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). In the present study, the technical classroom constitutes such a context, and lecturers' use of contextualised explanations, demonstrations, and repeated terminology appears to provide students with opportunities to develop discipline-specific communicative competence.

The findings also reinforce the argument emerging from Theme 1 that English proficiency and technical learning cannot be treated as entirely separate domains. When lecturers simplify technical explanations or connect terminology with practical demonstrations, they effectively integrate language learning with technical learning.

4.4.2 Institutional Provision and the Need for Technical English Support

Despite the value of lecturer-led strategies, both students and lecturers identified a need for more systematic and discipline-specific institutional support. Student 1 observed:

"The school provides some support, but I think we need more English lessons that are directly related to our technical courses."

This concern was echoed by Lecturer 3:

"The institution provides general language support, but there is a need for English programmes specifically designed around technical and vocational contexts."

The consistency between these accounts is particularly important because it demonstrates that the demand for technical English support is not solely a student perception. Lecturers also recognise a gap between general English provision and the specialised communication demands of technical education.

This finding has important implications for the design of TVET language provision. General communication courses may provide foundational language skills, but students in engineering, applied sciences, business, and other technical disciplines encounter discipline-specific vocabulary and communicative practices that require contextualised instruction. Students' request for additional

technical report writing and presentation practice similarly suggests that language development should be connected to the actual communicative practices students will encounter during their studies and future employment.

This finding supports the rationale for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approaches, which emphasise language instruction designed around learners' disciplinary and occupational needs. It also aligns with the employability perspective adopted in this study. If workplace readiness involves the ability to apply knowledge and skills within authentic occupational contexts (Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006), then technical communication should form part of students' preparation for those contexts rather than remain peripheral to technical education.

4.4.3 Uneven Institutional Integration of English Communication

Although participants acknowledged the importance of English communication, the findings indicate that its integration into technical education is not necessarily uniform. Student 3 reported:

"The support we receive depends on the lecturer. Some are patient when students struggle with English, while others move on quickly."

Student 8 similarly noted:

"The language support available to students is useful, but it should be more consistent across departments."

These accounts suggest that students' access to language-sensitive teaching may depend partly on the individual lecturer or department. Lecturer 6 independently confirmed this institutional variation:

"There are differences among departments in the extent to which English communication is integrated into technical teaching."

The convergence between these accounts provides a particularly important finding. Students' perceptions of uneven support are reflected in lecturers' recognition of differences across departments. Thus, the issue appears to extend beyond individual student proficiency to the institutional organisation of technical communication development.

This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that technical universities may differ in how they organise educational practices and respond to external demands (Benner, 2020; Larsen et al., 2020). However, the present study adds a language-specific dimension to this literature by demonstrating that institutional variation can influence how English communication is incorporated into technical learning.

The implication is that English-language development may currently be experienced as distributed and lecturer-dependent rather than systematically embedded across technical programmes. Where individual lecturers provide additional explanation, repetition, and opportunities for participation, students may

receive substantial informal language support. Where these practices are less prevalent, students may have fewer opportunities to overcome language-related barriers.

4.4.4 Institutional Constraints and the Tension Between Technical Content and Language Support

Lecturers also highlighted an important structural challenge that was less explicitly articulated by students: the difficulty of balancing technical-content delivery with students' language needs. Lecturer 5 explained:

"One of our major challenges is balancing the teaching of technical content with the need to support students who have language difficulties."

This finding introduces an important institutional tension. Technical lecturers are expected to cover substantial disciplinary content while simultaneously responding to differences in students' English proficiency. Where language difficulties require additional explanations, repetition, or alternative instructional approaches, lecturers may face competing demands between curriculum coverage and linguistic scaffolding.

This may help explain why some students perceive differences in lecturer responsiveness. The issue may not necessarily reflect unwillingness on the part of lecturers but rather differences in time, training, institutional expectations, or available support. The finding therefore points to a need for institutional mechanisms that support lecturers themselves rather than placing the responsibility for language development entirely on individual teaching staff.

This is an important extension of the study's theoretical framework. Communicative competence should not be conceptualised exclusively as an individual student attribute. The findings suggest that opportunities to develop communicative competence are partly produced through institutional pedagogical environments.

4.4.5 Effectiveness and Sustainability of Interventions

Participants further raised concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of existing interventions. Student 4 proposed:

"I think the institution should organize additional communication classes for students in technical programmes."

Similarly, Lecturer 8 recommended:

"Additional workshops on technical writing, presentations and workplace communication would improve students' readiness for employment."

These recommendations indicate that participants view communication development as requiring structured and sustained practice opportunities, rather than occasional exposure. This concern was

reinforced by Lecturer 9:

“Some interventions have improved students' confidence, but their effectiveness is limited when they are not sustained throughout the programme.”

The issue of sustainability is analytically important. Short-term workshops or isolated communication interventions may improve students' confidence temporarily, but sustained competence requires repeated opportunities to practise technical communication throughout the educational trajectory. This is consistent with the employability perspective, which views employability as involving the continuing development and adaptation of skills rather than the acquisition of a fixed set of competencies at a single point in time (Yorke, 2006; Oliver, 2015).

The students' recommendation that communication skills be assessed as part of technical training is therefore particularly significant. Student 10 stated:

“I think the institution should assess our communication skills as part of our technical training.”

This suggests that participants perceive communication as sufficiently integral to technical competence to warrant formal curricular and assessment recognition. Lecturer 10 expressed an almost identical conceptual position:

“English proficiency should be viewed as part of technical competence because graduates must be able to communicate their knowledge in the workplace.”

The convergence here is particularly strong. Both groups challenge a narrow conception of technical competence in which practical performance is separated from the ability to explain, document, and communicate technical knowledge.

4.4.6 Synthesis

Taken together, the findings suggest that English-related challenges in technical universities cannot be adequately explained by students' individual proficiency alone. Rather, the experiences reported by participants point to an institutionally mediated process in which lecturer practices, curriculum arrangements, language-support mechanisms, and opportunities for sustained communication practice influence students' ability to participate in English-mediated technical education.

Three particularly important insights emerge. First, lecturer responsiveness matters: simplification, contextualisation, repetition, demonstrations, and opportunities for clarification can make technical English more accessible. Second, participants perceive a gap between general English support and discipline-specific technical communication, suggesting a need for more integrated approaches to language development. Third, participants emphasise that communication development should be sustained and embedded within technical programmes, rather than delivered through isolated interventions.

The findings therefore strengthen the central argument of this study: English proficiency should not be treated as an auxiliary skill that students acquire separately from technical competence. It is part of the communicative infrastructure through which technical knowledge is learned, demonstrated, and ultimately applied in professional settings. The institutional environment determines, in part, whether students are provided with sufficient opportunities to develop this communicative capacity.

4.5.5 Institutional Context and the Multiple-Case Dimension

The findings revealed that English-language challenges were experienced across both technical universities, but the institutional context shaped how these challenges were managed and experienced. Analysis of student and lecturer accounts identified three related dimensions: lecturer-mediated support, the relevance and accessibility of institutional language provision, and the consistency and sustainability of communication interventions. While there was considerable convergence between the two cases regarding the importance of English in technical education, differences emerged in the emphasis placed on technical relevance in University A and consistency and sustainability in University B.

University A: Lecturer-Mediated Support and Technical-Specific Language Provision

In University A, participants strongly emphasised the role of lecturers in helping students overcome English-related difficulties in technical learning. Lecturer 1 observed:

“Students' English proficiency directly affects how quickly they understand technical concepts, particularly when the concepts involve unfamiliar terminology.”

This observation is consistent with students' experiences. Student 1 explained:

“When the lecturer uses too many technical English words, I understand the practical demonstration, but I struggle to explain what I have learned.”

Similarly, Student 6 noted:

“I understand better when the lecturer explains the technical word first before using it in the lesson.”

These accounts indicate that unfamiliar technical terminology can create a barrier between students' practical understanding and their ability to comprehend or articulate technical knowledge. However, participants also demonstrated that lecturer practices can mitigate this challenge. Lecturer 2 explained:

“We often have to simplify our explanations or use demonstrations because some students struggle to understand technical instructions in English.”

The students similarly recognised the value of this approach. Student 5 reported:

“When lecturers use examples from our practical work to teach English, it becomes easier for us to understand.”

The convergence between student and lecturer accounts suggests that contextualised pedagogical support plays an important role in University A. Simplification, practical demonstrations, and the deliberate explanation of technical vocabulary provide students with alternative routes for accessing technical content.

Nevertheless, University A participants identified limitations in relying primarily on classroom-level responses. Lecturer 5 explained:

"One of our major challenges is balancing the teaching of technical content with the need to support students who have language difficulties."

This suggests that lecturers are required to address linguistic differences while simultaneously meeting the demands of technical-content delivery. The challenge therefore has an institutional dimension because language support is partly incorporated into lecturers' existing teaching responsibilities.

Participants also identified a need for more specialised institutional provision. Lecturer 3 stated:

"The institution provides general language support, but there is a need for English programmes specifically designed around technical and vocational contexts."

This view is reinforced by Student 1, who argued:

"The school provides some support, but I think we need more English lessons that are directly related to our technical courses."

The similarity between these accounts is significant. Both students and lecturers perceive a distinction between general English support and the discipline-specific language required in technical education. University A therefore appears to have some existing support mechanisms, but participants perceive a need for stronger integration of English with the technical curriculum.

University B: Consistency, Departmental Integration and Sustained Communication Development

The University B case revealed a somewhat different institutional emphasis. Here, participants drew greater attention to variability in the integration of English communication across departments and the continuity of interventions. Lecturer 6 observed:

"There are differences among departments in the extent to which English communication is integrated into technical teaching."

Students expressed a similar concern regarding consistency. Student 8 stated:

"The language support available to students is useful, but it should be more consistent across departments."

Student 6 further highlighted an accessibility problem:

“There are times when I need help with English, but I do not know where to go for that support.”

Together, these accounts suggest that the issue in University B extends beyond whether support exists to whether students can consistently access it across different academic environments.

At the classroom level, however, lecturers reported strategies for integrating English with technical learning. Lecturer 7 explained:

“I encourage students to use technical vocabulary repeatedly so that the language becomes familiar alongside the practical skills.”

This approach corresponds with students' emphasis on the importance of technical vocabulary. Student 13 noted:

“If I understand the technical vocabulary, I can follow the lesson much more easily.”

Student 19 similarly explained:

“Knowing the technical terms in English helps me communicate what I am doing during practical sessions.”

The convergence suggests that, as in University A, lecturer-mediated practices can facilitate the development of technical communication. However, University B participants placed greater emphasis on ensuring that such opportunities are systematic and sustained throughout the programme.

Lecturer 8 stated:

“Additional workshops on technical writing, presentations and workplace communication would improve students' readiness for employment.”

This corresponds with Student 7's observation:

“More practice in presentations and technical report writing would help us prepare for the workplace.”

The emphasis on technical writing, presentations, and workplace communication indicates that participants perceive English development as extending beyond classroom comprehension towards the professional communication demands students are likely to encounter after graduation.

The importance of continuity was further highlighted by Lecturer 9:

“Some interventions have improved students' confidence, but their effectiveness is limited when they are not sustained throughout the programme.”

This introduces a significant institutional concern: isolated language interventions may produce short-term improvements, but participants perceive sustained exposure and practice as necessary for developing durable communication competence.

The multiple-case evidence suggests that English proficiency should not be understood solely as an individual characteristic of students. Rather, its consequences for technical learning and workplace preparation are institutionally mediated. The same language difficulty may have different consequences depending on whether lecturers provide contextualised explanations, whether students have access to specialised language support, and whether opportunities to develop technical communication are consistently embedded across the programme.

This finding is particularly important in relation to the study's theoretical framework. From the perspective of Communicative Competence Theory, students require opportunities to use language meaningfully within the contexts in which communication occurs. The findings demonstrate that such opportunities are shaped by lecturer practices and institutional arrangements. Similarly, the Employability/Work Readiness perspective suggests that workplace preparation involves the development and application of multiple competencies rather than technical knowledge alone. Participants' emphasis on technical writing, presentations, workplace communication, and the ability to communicate technical knowledge reinforces this integrated understanding of workplace readiness.

Generally, the cross-case analysis demonstrates that both universities face a shared challenge of English-mediated technical education, but institutional context influences the form that this challenge takes and the strategies used to address it. University A points more strongly towards the need for discipline-specific English provision and greater support for lecturers managing language diversity, whereas University B highlights the importance of consistent departmental integration and sustained communication development. The common implication across both cases is that English should be embedded within technical education rather than treated as a separate or peripheral competency.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that English language proficiency is not peripheral to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), but functions as an important communicative foundation through which students access technical knowledge, develop technical communication competence, and prepare for workplace participation. Across the two technical universities, students and lecturers consistently described English as central to understanding technical terminology, interpreting instructional materials, participating in learning activities, and communicating technical knowledge. This finding is consistent with Ja'afaru and Agantiem (2026), who reported a strong positive relationship between English proficiency and performance in technical subjects, and with Mollah et al. (2025), who showed that technical English proficiency supports conceptual understanding and reasoning. However, the present study adds qualitative depth by showing how this relationship is experienced in practice. Students indicated that unfamiliar technical terminology, complex instructional materials, and difficulty interpreting questions could make technical subjects appear more difficult than they actually were. Thus, English proficiency appears to influence not only students' academic performance but also their access to the technical knowledge embedded within an English-mediated learning environment.

This finding is well explained by Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). Technical learning requires students to understand specialised vocabulary, interpret explanations, ask questions, participate in discussions, and articulate technical ideas coherently. Consequently, students' difficulties with English may restrict their ability to demonstrate technical understanding even where they possess practical knowledge. The finding that some students could follow practical demonstrations but struggled to explain what they had learned illustrates this distinction between technical capability and communicative capability. The lecturers' use of simplified explanations, demonstrations, repetition, and practical examples further suggests that communicative competence is developed within the interaction between learners and their instructional environment rather than through language proficiency alone.

The findings further demonstrate that English proficiency extends beyond classroom learning to shape technical communication and perceived workplace readiness. Participants viewed the ability to explain technical procedures, communicate problems, write reports and emails, participate in meetings, interact with supervisors and customers, and perform confidently during interviews as important dimensions of workplace preparedness. This supports Yusof et al. (2017), who argued that technical skills alone may be insufficient for TVET graduates when they cannot effectively communicate their competencies, and Ting et al. (2017), who identified English as important for workplace communication, recruitment, and career advancement. It also agrees with Powzi and Yamat (2017) and Mikkola and Valo (2019), who emphasised communication as a central workplace competency. The present study contributes to this literature by showing that students perceive English not simply as an employer requirement but as the means through which their technical competence becomes visible and usable in professional settings.

This interpretation is consistent with Employability/Work Readiness Theory (Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006), which conceptualises employability as encompassing the skills, understanding, and personal attributes required to obtain and function effectively in employment. Participants' accounts demonstrate this broader understanding of workplace readiness. They did not regard possessing a technical certificate or knowing how to operate equipment as sufficient. Instead, they emphasised the ability to explain technical knowledge, understand workplace instructions, interact with professionals, and communicate confidently. The finding also supports Suojanen (2019) and Slattery and Cleary (2013), who highlight the value of practical and industry-relevant technical communication experiences in preparing students for employment. In this respect, English proficiency represents a bridge between what students know technically and their ability to apply and communicate that knowledge at work.

The multiple-case findings add an important institutional dimension to this relationship. Although both universities experienced similar English-related challenges, their responses differed in emphasis. University A participants highlighted the need for technical-specific English provision and the difficulty of balancing language support with technical-content delivery, whereas University B participants placed greater emphasis on departmental consistency and the sustainability of communication interventions. These findings suggest that English proficiency should not be treated solely as an individual student deficit. Institutional practices, lecturer responsiveness, curriculum integration, and access to sustained

language support can either mitigate or reinforce language-related barriers. This finding supports Adam's (2026) argument for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes aligned with occupational contexts and reinforces Oliver's (2015) view that employability requires the continual development and adaptation of relevant skills.

The findings position English language proficiency as a core component of technical competence and workplace readiness in Ghanaian TVET. The evidence suggests a progression from English proficiency to access to technical learning, technical communication, professional interaction, and perceived workplace readiness. Importantly, this relationship is institutionally mediated: students require not only sufficient English proficiency but also opportunities to practise technical communication within authentic disciplinary and occupational contexts. The study therefore extends existing research by shifting the focus from viewing English as a generic academic or “soft” skill towards understanding it as a communicative infrastructure for acquiring, demonstrating, and applying technical competence. For technical universities in Ghana, the implication is not simply to increase general English instruction, but to embed discipline-specific English, technical writing, presentations, workplace communication, and sustained communicative practice within TVET curricula. This integrated approach would more closely align technical education with the communication demands of contemporary workplaces and strengthen the transition from technical learning to workplace readiness.

Conclusion

This study examined how English language proficiency shapes technical learning, technical communication, and workplace readiness in two technical universities in Ghana. The findings demonstrate that English proficiency functions as an important gateway to technical learning, influencing students' understanding of specialised terminology, instructional materials, technical explanations, and classroom participation. Participants also perceived English as essential for communicating technical knowledge, interacting with supervisors and colleagues, preparing professional reports and presentations, and demonstrating competence during employment-related interactions. The study further shows that English proficiency and technical competence are complementary rather than separate capabilities. While technical training equips students with occupational knowledge and skills, English communication enables them to articulate, demonstrate, and apply those competencies effectively in workplace settings. This finding reinforces Communicative Competence Theory and the Employability/Work Readiness perspective by demonstrating the importance of contextual language use in both learning and professional participation. The multiple-case findings revealed common English-related challenges across the two universities but differences in institutional emphasis. University A highlighted the need for discipline-specific English provision and lecturer support, whereas University B emphasised consistency and sustained communication development. The study therefore concludes that improving students' English proficiency should not be treated solely as an individual responsibility. Technical universities should integrate discipline-specific English, technical writing, presentations, and workplace communication throughout technical programmes. Such an integrated approach can strengthen the connection between technical learning,

communicative competence, and workplace readiness, ultimately producing TVET graduates better prepared to apply and communicate their technical expertise in contemporary employment contexts.

Policy, practical, research, theoretical implications and recommendations

6.1 Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for TVET language and curriculum policy in Ghana. English proficiency should be recognised within TVET policy as an integral component of technical competence and employability rather than as a generic academic requirement. The findings indicate that students encounter English not only in communication courses but throughout technical learning, including textbooks, equipment manuals, lectures, practical instructions, reports, and workplace interactions. Consequently, TVET curriculum policies should promote the integration of technical English and communication competencies across technical programmes.

Policy should also encourage the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) provisions that reflect the language demands of different occupational fields. Such provision would enable students to develop the terminology and communication practices required within their respective industries. In addition, institutional policies should promote consistent language-support structures across departments rather than leaving language development primarily to individual lecturers.

6.2 Practical Implications

Practically, technical universities should embed communication development within technical teaching and learning. Lecturers can incorporate technical vocabulary, report writing, presentations, professional correspondence, workplace simulations, and oral explanations of technical procedures into disciplinary courses. The findings also indicate the value of lecturer strategies such as simplifying complex terminology, using practical demonstrations, repeating technical vocabulary, and providing opportunities for students to ask questions.

Universities should further provide sustained communication support throughout students' programmes rather than relying on isolated workshops. Technical communication activities should progressively increase in complexity and reflect authentic workplace situations. Collaboration between technical lecturers and language specialists could also facilitate the development of discipline-specific learning materials and communication activities.

6.3 Research Implications

The study opens several avenues for future research. First, subsequent studies could quantitatively examine the relationship between English proficiency, technical academic performance, and actual

employment outcomes among TVET graduates. Second, longitudinal research could investigate whether improvements in technical English during university translate into stronger workplace performance after graduation. Third, intervention studies could evaluate the effectiveness of ESP and embedded technical-communication programmes in improving students' communication competence and workplace readiness.

Future research could also incorporate employers' perspectives, which were not directly represented in the present study. Examining employers' expectations of TVET graduates' English and technical communication competencies would provide an important external perspective on the workplace-readiness claims identified by students and lecturers.

6.4 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes theoretically by bringing Communicative Competence Theory (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983) and Employability/Work Readiness Theory (Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2006) into a common framework for understanding English in TVET. The findings suggest that communicative competence is not simply an independent language attribute; it operates within technical learning environments where students must interpret, negotiate, and communicate specialised knowledge.

The findings further suggest that English proficiency can be conceptualised as a linking mechanism between technical competence and workplace readiness. Technical knowledge provides the substantive expertise, while communicative competence enables graduates to explain, demonstrate, and apply that expertise in professional settings. The study therefore extends the application of both theories by highlighting the institutional and disciplinary context within which communication and employability competencies develop

6.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, four key recommendations are proposed:

1. Technical universities should move beyond general English instruction and incorporate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into technical programmes. Instruction should focus on the terminology, technical writing, report preparation, presentations, and communication practices relevant to students' specific occupational fields.
2. Technical lecturers should receive professional development on strategies for supporting students with varying levels of English proficiency. Approaches such as simplifying technical terminology, using practical demonstrations, encouraging repeated use of technical vocabulary, and providing opportunities for clarification should be systematically incorporated into technical teaching.
3. Universities should provide students with continuous opportunities to practise technical report writing, presentations, professional correspondence, workplace instructions, and oral explanations of technical procedures throughout their programmes. These competencies should be incorporated into relevant course assessments rather than treated as optional skills.

4. Technical universities should provide accessible language-support services across departments and ensure that such support is sustained throughout students' programmes. Universities should also collaborate with industry to identify the communication competencies expected of graduates and incorporate authentic workplace communication tasks into technical education and industrial attachment programmes.

Declarations

6.6 Disclosure statement

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6.8 Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations concerning the research participants.

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Author Contributions

Gifty Serwah Mensah: Conceptualization, study design, methodology, supervision, data interpretation, writing of the original draft, and overall coordination of the manuscript.

Victoria Owusu-Ansah: Literature review, methodology development, validation of the research instrument, interpretation of findings, and critical review and editing of the manuscript.

Faustina Amponsah Partey: Data collection, data organization, thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and review and editing of the manuscript.

Rosemary Gifty Addo-Danquah: Data collection, transcription and data preparation, thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and review and editing of the manuscript.

All authors read, critically reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the work.

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