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The Importance of English Proficiency Amongst Technical and Vocational (TVET) Graduates: A General Review

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Abstract

This study examines the critical role of English language proficiency in enhancing the employability and global competitiveness of Malaysian Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates. While TVET institutions effectively cultivate practical skills, the advent of Industry 4.0 and globalized labor markets demands robust communication capabilities alongside technical expertise. Technical knowledge alone is increasingly insufficient, as employers expect graduates to navigate complex documentation, safety guidelines, and multinational collaborations. Consequently, this paper advocates for the strategic integration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into TVET curricula. By embedding authentic industry-based communication tasks, TVET institutions can bridge the skills mismatch and produce an adaptable, highly marketable workforce.

1. Introduction

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an educational pathway that focuses on providing practical, industry-driven skills combined with academic knowledge. The TVET ecosystem is structured by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) across three distinct institutional tiers, namely Malaysian Technical University Network (MTUN), polytechnics, and community colleges. As of 2026, MOHE confirms there are four MTUN (Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA), Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), and Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)), 36 polytechnics and 106 community colleges nationwide.

TVET focuses more on driving for global competitiveness in which the primary aspiration is to produce employable professionals for global markets. These markets operate heavily on English speaking environments where fluency is considered a strict requirement. In supporting this aspiration, Ministry of Higher Education (MOE) established benchmarks for academic foundation. In the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2026-2035 English proficiency is mapped on to the TVET readiness. MOE sets the baseline academic targets such as achieving a minimum Grade "C" in English. This set up is aimed at ensuring students possess linguistic capabilities required to handle complex technical problem-solving and documentation before entering premier Advanced TVET pathway in higher Education.

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Much emphasis on TVET has been given by the government through the implementation of the National Education Blueprint for Higher Education and the JPPKK Strategic Plan 2018-2025.

2. TVET in Malaysia

TVET has become the most strategic plan for human capital development as it provides structured opportunities to develops occupational knowledge, practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and work-related competencies. TVET's central objective is to produce graduates who can contribute effectively to industrial and economic development through industry-relevant education and training (Minghat et al., 2022; Mustaffa et al., 2024). Consequently, bridging the persistent skills mismatch necessitates continuous alignment of TVET curricula with emerging technological advancements and dynamic labor market demands. By prioritizing advanced practical competencies alongside adaptive soft skills, these institutions cultivate a resilient workforce essential for sustaining national competitiveness.

Technical competence remains an essential component of TVET, employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate communication, teamwork, creativity, critical thinking, digital literacy, adaptability, and entrepreneurial capabilities. Evidence from Malaysian studies indicates that employability is influenced not only by students' technical knowledge but also by their ability to apply that knowledge in authentic workplace contexts (Halik Bassah & Mohd Noor, 2023; Sharil et al., 2024). Therefore, stronger collaboration between TVET institutions and industry is necessary. Such collaboration may include curriculum co-development, industrial training, work-based learning, industry led assessment, lecturer attachments, and employer participation in programme evaluation.

The transformation of Malaysian TVET is also increasingly influenced by the global digitalisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0). Technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, robotics, automation, cloud computing, simulation, and data analytics are changing occupational structures and creating new expectations for technical workers. They must be able to interpret manuals, understand digital and technical documentation, communicate with multinational teams, prepare reports, deliver presentations, and explain technical information accurately in technology-mediated workplaces.

Accordingly, TVET institutions must update their curricula, facilities, teaching practices, and educator-development programmes to prepare students for technology-intensive workplaces. One of the most important updates is to stress the emphasis of English competency since employers are now increasingly regard English proficiency and communication skills as important indicators of workplace readiness, career mobility, and the capacity to work effectively in globalized industries (Suhaili & Mohamad, 2021; Ting et al., 2017). Therefore, Malaysian TVET institutions should integrate English for Specific Purposes (ESP), technical vocabulary, workplace writing, oral presentations, and authentic industry-based communication tasks into technical curricula rather than treating English as a supplementary subject.

3. The Importance of English Proficiency for TVET Graduates

English proficiency is increasingly important for TVET graduates because it enables them to interpret technical manuals, understand workplace instructions, communicate with colleagues and clients, prepare reports, and participate in meetings or presentations. In technology-driven and international workplaces, effective English communication can improve graduates' confidence, employability, work performance, and career progression.

Therefore, TVET curricula should integrate English for Specific Purposes through authentic tasks such as technical writing, workplace simulations, oral presentations, and job interviews. Such integration can help graduates apply their technical knowledge more effectively and respond to employers' communication expectations (Shamsuddin et al., 2026; Suhaili et al., 2025).

3.1 The Importance of English Proficiency for the Industry

English proficiency is essential for TVET graduates as it is widely used in technical documentation, operating manuals, safety guidelines, software interfaces, and workplace communication. Graduates who can understand and use technical English are better prepared to follow instructions accurately, operate equipment safely, and apply industry procedures effectively. In contrast, limited English proficiency may lead to misunderstanding, operational errors, and reduced workplace performance (Suhaili et al., 2021).

In many industries, TVET graduates are required to communicate with supervisors, engineers, clients, suppliers, and colleagues from different professional and cultural backgrounds. English enables them to explain technical problems, participate in meetings, prepare reports, deliver presentations, and collaborate with multinational teams. Employer-related research in Malaysia indicates that English proficiency is an important

employability attribute, although it remains an area requiring further improvement among technical graduates (Mazlan & Rahim, 2025).

English proficiency also influences TVET graduates' career progression and participation in the global industry. Graduates who communicate confidently in English are more capable of attending professional training, accessing international knowledge, supporting cross-border projects, and pursuing promotion opportunities. Therefore, TVET institutions should integrate English for Specific Purposes into technical subjects through workplace simulations, technical report writing, presentations, interviews, and industry-based projects. This integration can help graduates connect technical expertise with effective professional communication (Ali et al., 2025; Husin et al., 2025).

3.2 The Importance of English Proficiency for Employability

English proficiency is a significant component of employability for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates because employability involves more than possessing occupation-specific technical knowledge. It also includes the ability to communicate clearly, collaborate with others, solve workplace problems, and respond appropriately to professional situations. In Malaysia, communication competence is identified as one of the generic skills that contributes to the marketability and workplace readiness of TVET graduates (Che Rus et al., 2023).

English is particularly important for TVET graduates because it is frequently used in technical manuals, standard operating procedures, safety guidelines, equipment specifications, software interfaces, and professional correspondence. Graduates with stronger English proficiency are better positioned to understand instructions accurately and communicate technical information to supervisors, colleagues, customers, and industry partners. These abilities can reduce misunderstandings, support safer work practices, and improve overall job performance (Ramamuruthy et al., 2021).

English proficiency can also influence graduates' access to employment opportunities and career advancement. Employers increasingly value candidates who can participate confidently in interviews, meetings, presentations, and workplace discussions, especially in multinational and technology-oriented industries. Research in the Malaysian context shows that employers consider English proficiency and communication skills important employability attributes, while a mismatch between graduates' language abilities and workplace expectations may restrict their career mobility (Ting et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2025).

Therefore, English should be embedded meaningfully within TVET programmes rather than taught as an isolated general subject. English for Specific Purposes activities, including technical report writing, workplace simulations, oral presentations, role plays, and industry-based projects, can help students practise the language required in their future occupations. Such curriculum integration can strengthen graduates' confidence, communicative performance, and ability to convert technical knowledge into effective workplace action, thereby improving their employability in Malaysia's increasingly competitive labour market (Che Rus et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2025).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Malaysian TVET plays a vital role in developing a technically competent, adaptable, and industry-ready workforce. However, technical knowledge alone is insufficient to meet the demands of Industry 4.0 and an increasingly globalized labor market. English proficiency should therefore be recognized as an essential employability competency that enables TVET graduates to interpret technical information, communicate effectively, collaborate across professional and cultural boundaries, and access wider career opportunities. By integrating English for Specific Purposes with technical subjects, workplace simulations, industry-based projects, and authentic communication tasks, TVET institutions can strengthen graduates' confidence, professional performance, and career mobility. Such an integrated approach would enhance the responsiveness of Malaysian TVET and contribute to the development of a resilient and globally competitive workforce.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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