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Technical Communication and Employability English Language Development in Polytechnic Education: A Review

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Abstract

This review examines technical communication and employability-oriented English language development in polytechnic education, drawing on eighteen recent studies published mainly between 2022 and 2024. The reviewed literature shows that English in technical and vocational settings is most useful when it is directly connected to discipline-specific needs, workplace communication, soft skills, digital competence, and authentic professional tasks, rather than treated as a generic academic subject. The studies discuss needs analysis, technical communication modules, project- and task-based learning, web-based learning platforms, intercultural communication, curriculum evaluation, and the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Technical English, across contexts that include South and Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The review synthesises these strands thematically to identify common priorities, points of disagreement, implementation challenges, and future research directions for polytechnic institutions. It further considers the practical implications of the literature for institutions, English language teachers, students, and industry partners, and identifies limitations in the current evidence base. The findings support a shift from general English instruction toward an integrated model in which language learning is embedded in technical study and employability preparation, combining discipline-specific content, communicative and interpersonal competence, digital and AI literacy, and intercultural awareness within a coherent curriculum framework.

Keywords: *Technical Communication, English Language Development, Vocational Education, Technical English, Digital Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Polytechnic education is intended to prepare learners for practical occupations by combining theoretical knowledge with technical and occupational competence. In this environment, English is not only a general academic subject; it can also support students in understanding technical information, documenting work, collaborating with others, and communicating in professional settings. Gautam [1] connects English studies and technical communication with employability, emphasising the role of communication and soft skills in the transition from classroom learning to career participation.

The language demands of polytechnic learners are different from those of students studying English in a general academic programme. Learners may need to read manuals and specifications, understand safety instructions, explain procedures, write reports, deliver technical presentations, participate in meetings, and communicate with supervisors or customers. Ali, Hamid, and Ahmad [2] show through a review of TVET workplace needs that communication competence is closely related to workplace performance and should include language proficiency, technical vocabulary, workplace communication, and interpersonal behaviour.

A further issue is variation among students and programmes. Polytechnic cohorts may include learners with different levels of general English proficiency, while the communication requirements of mechanical, electrical, information technology, manufacturing, business, and other technical fields are not identical.

Romadhon et al. [3] illustrate this point through a vocational English needs analysis for mechanical engineering students, indicating the importance of aligning language content with the communication tasks of a specific discipline.

Beyond the classroom, employers in technical and vocational sectors consistently identify communication ability alongside technical competence when evaluating graduate readiness for work. This expectation is visible across the studies reviewed here: Kidane, Woldeyohanis, and Alemu [4] document the growing institutional attention given to soft-skills teaching in Ethiopian polytechnic colleges, while Fathulloh, Irfan, and Hariyanto [5] connect curriculum design directly to the employability outcomes of vocational graduates. Taken together, these studies indicate that English language development in polytechnic settings cannot be separated from the broader question of how well graduates are prepared to function in workplace environments.

This review brings together eighteen recent studies that address technical communication, employability English, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), pedagogy, digital learning, and AI-supported instruction in polytechnic and related vocational settings. The purpose of the paper is to synthesise this evidence, identify the major areas of agreement and difference among the studies, and outline practical directions for English language development in polytechnic education. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section II summarises the individual studies; Sections III and IV examine technical communication, employability English, and pedagogical and digital approaches in more depth; Section V discusses cross-cutting themes; Section VI sets out implementation challenges; Section VII considers implications for stakeholders; and Section VIII concludes.

RELATED WORK

The following overview introduces each of the eighteen reviewed studies in turn, summarising its focus and situating its contribution within the wider evidence base. Table 1 then consolidates this information alongside the research approach used in each study and the implication it carries for polytechnic English.

Omotayo-Olotu, Nwoka, and Babalola examine social-media language practices and the movement from code-switching toward digital competence in Nigerian polytechnic education. Their work broadens the idea of

communication beyond classroom English and draws attention to multilingual, multimodal, and online forms of language use. Because so much everyday communication among students already takes place through social media, their findings suggest that formal curricula may be lagging behind the communicative repertoires students already use outside class. [6]

Jahan investigates English language teaching in Bangladesh's polytechnic institutions from educators' perspectives. The study highlights curriculum effectiveness and student outcomes as important concerns, showing that institutional conditions and curriculum design influence the success of English teaching. The educators' perspective is a useful counterpoint to learner-centred studies elsewhere in this review, since it draws attention to staffing, workload, and institutional support as preconditions for curriculum change. [7]

Liu et al. develop an intercultural technical communication module for cross-border e-commerce using a Fuzzy Delphi approach. The study indicates that technical communication can require both professional language skills and the ability to adapt messages for users from different cultural and communication backgrounds. Its use of expert-consensus techniques also offers a methodological model for curriculum development that other polytechnic contexts could adapt. [8]

Aina et al. discuss artificial intelligence and the future of English language teaching in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Their contribution places AI within a broader transformation of language education and suggests that future English teaching will need to address technology-supported learning as well as changing roles for teachers and learners. The study is notable for treating AI as an institutional and pedagogical shift rather than as a single tool added to existing practice. [9]

Yacoub presents a comprehensive needs analysis framework for aligning English language instruction with engineering requirements. The study reinforces the role of systematic needs analysis in identifying the language functions, skills, and content that should shape an ESP syllabus for engineering learners. Because needs analysis recurs across so many of the studies reviewed here, Yacoub's framework offers a useful reference point for comparing how different researchers operationalise the same basic principle. [10]

Fitriani and Paradista study Business English at Madyathika Polytechnic from a learner-centred perspective. Their work draws attention to learner challenges and benefits in business-oriented English and supports the use of context-specific activities rather than relying only on general language exercises. Their emphasis on learner voice complements the more institution- or curriculum-centred perspectives found elsewhere in the review. [11]

Rossydi et al. describe the development of a web-based English learning platform for vocational education. Their study links language learning with digital access and provides support for using web-based environments to expand opportunities for practice beyond the conventional classroom. The platform-development focus also illustrates the practical, applied character of much of the recent literature in this area. [12]

Sari evaluates the English curriculum in a polytechnic context and provides recommendations for curriculum improvement. The study is important because it considers not only individual learning activities but also programme-level questions concerning curriculum content, course provision, and the place of English within technical education. This programme-level lens is a useful complement to the classroom- and course-level focus of many other studies in the review. [13]

Hsu, Su, and Su examine project-based learning in ESP for engineering education. Their work supports the use of projects as a context in which learners can connect language development with technical problem-solving, collaboration, and discipline-specific communication. The pedagogical strategies they describe provide a concrete starting point for institutions considering project-based approaches in other technical fields. [14]

Rahmanu and Molnár examine ESP needs in vocational higher education through listening and reading data. Their findings help demonstrate that receptive skills remain important in vocational contexts and should be considered when institutions design English curricula around technical study and workplace information. Their focus on receptive skills usefully balances the productive-skills emphasis of much of the pedagogical literature discussed in Section V. [15]

Sitio et al. conduct a needs analysis of an ESP course for Indonesian vocational tertiary students. The study reinforces the principle that course design should begin with evidence about learners' and future professionals' language

requirements, rather than applying a uniform English syllabus to all technical programmes. Their course-level needs analysis complements the broader curriculum evaluations described elsewhere in this review. [16]

Zainuddin, Mat Daud, and Hussein analyse polytechnic students' acceptance and use of AI tools for Technical English. Their study is relevant to the adoption of AI-assisted learning because it considers factors that influence whether students actually accept and use such tools in a technical language context. Their use of PLS-SEM modelling also offers a methodological example for future research seeking to quantify the drivers of technology adoption in similar settings. [17]

Amante presents a task-based approach to teaching accounting through ESP. The study demonstrates how authentic disciplinary tasks can be used to develop language while learners perform activities that resemble professional practice, providing a model that can be adapted to other vocational fields. Because accounting is comparatively underrepresented in the vocational-English literature relative to engineering, this study helps broaden the disciplinary coverage of the review. [18]

Table 1. Synthesis of the Reviewed Studies

Ref.	Context / Focus	Key Contribution	Implication for Polytechnic English
[1]	Employability, soft skills, technical communication	Links English and technical communication with career readiness.	Embed communication and soft skills in employability preparation.
[2]	TVET workplace communication	Synthesises workplace communication needs.	Prioritise proficiency, technical vocabulary, genres, interpersonal and contextual skills.
[3]	Mechanical engineering ESP	Identifies discipline-specific English needs.	Differentiate language content according to technical specialisation.
[4]	Ethiopian polytechnic soft skills	Examines the teaching of soft skills.	Integrate teamwork, interpersonal communication, and professional behaviour.

[5]	Electrical graduate employability	Reviews curriculum-employability relationships.	Align language and employability development with occupational outcomes.
[6]	Nigerian polytechnic, social media	Examines code-switching and digital language practices.	Develop digital and professional online communication awareness.
[7]	Bangladesh polytechnic ELT	Examines curriculum effectiveness and student outcomes.	Strengthen curriculum alignment and institutional support.
[8]	Cross-border e-commerce	Develops an intercultural technical communication module.	Include audience and intercultural adaptation in technical communication.
[9]	Nigerian tertiary English teaching	Reviews AI-related transformation in English teaching.	Prepare teachers and learners for AI-supported language learning.
[10]	Engineering ESP	Provides a needs analysis framework for syllabus design.	Start curriculum planning with systematic discipline-specific needs analysis.
[11]	Business English in polytechnic	Reports learner-centred challenges and benefits.	Use relevant business tasks and learner-centred activities.
[12]	Vocational web-based learning	Develops a web-based English learning platform.	Extend language practice through accessible digital environments.
[13]	Polytechnic curriculum evaluation	Reviews English curriculum provision and recommendations.	Strengthen curriculum coherence, exposure, and programme-level planning.
[14]	Engineering ESP, project-based learning	Connects projects with discipline-specific language development.	Use technical projects to integrate language and practical learning.

[15]	Vocational higher education	Analyses ESP needs using listening and reading evidence.	Maintain balanced attention to receptive and productive skills.
[16]	Indonesian vocational tertiary ESP	Conducts course needs analysis.	Design courses around evidence from learners and professional contexts.
[17]	Polytechnic Technical English and AI	Analyses factors influencing AI tool acceptance and use.	Adopt AI with clear purposes, support, and user awareness.
[18]	Accounting ESP, task-based learning	Uses authentic professional tasks to teach English.	Assess language through realistic vocational tasks.
[19]	Vocational manufacturing	Develops an expert-informed technical communication module.	Use explicit technical communication objectives, content, activities, and assessment.

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYABILITY ENGLISH

This section develops the review's central theme in more depth, drawing on the studies introduced in Section II to examine what technical communication and employability English mean in practice for polytechnic learners.

Defining Technical Communication in Polytechnic Contexts

Technical communication in polytechnic education is best understood as purposeful communication that helps learners explain, document, interpret, or coordinate technical work. It includes written forms such as reports, emails, instructions, maintenance records, summaries, specifications, and project documentation, as well as oral forms such as briefings, demonstrations, presentations, interviews, and workplace discussions. The emphasis is therefore on using language to complete technical and professional tasks rather than treating language accuracy as an isolated objective. This task-oriented view is consistent with the technical communication module described by Luo, DeWitt, and Alias [19], whose expert-informed design likewise treats communication as something learners do in the course of technical work rather than as a subject studied for its own sake.

Employability English and the Transition to Work

Employability English extends this idea by connecting language learning with the ability to participate in recruitment, teamwork, customer interaction, workplace problem-solving, and professional development. Gautam [1] places soft skills, technical communication, and English studies within the broader transition from classroom to career, supporting an integrated rather than separated view of language and employability development. This integrated view is echoed by Fathulloh, Irfan, and Hariyanto [5], whose systematic review connects vocational curriculum design directly to the employability outcomes of electrical engineering graduates, and it implies that English courses should be evaluated partly by how well they prepare students for the communicative demands of recruitment and early employment, not only by conventional language-proficiency measures.

Discipline-Specific Language Needs

The needs of different technical fields should remain visible in curriculum planning. Engineering learners, for example, may need to describe processes and systems, whereas business or accounting learners may require more interaction with customers, financial information, and professional documentation. Yacoub [10] demonstrates why needs analysis is central to ESP syllabus design: the syllabus should be based on the actual language functions and tasks required in the target field. Romadhon et al. [3] and Fitriani and Paradista [11] reinforce this point from mechanical-engineering and business contexts respectively, showing that even within a single review, the specific content of “technical English” varies considerably by discipline and cannot be reduced to a single generic syllabus.

Interpersonal and Soft-Skills Competence

Interpersonal competence is another important part of employability. Kidane, Woldeyohanis, and Alemu [4] show that soft skills deserve explicit attention within polytechnic education. In practical terms, this means that English lessons can include teamwork, turn-taking, asking for clarification, giving feedback, negotiating meaning, handling disagreement professionally, and adapting communication to supervisors, colleagues, and customers. Their institutional status survey also suggests that such skills are frequently acknowledged as important in policy documents while remaining inconsistently implemented in day-to-day teaching, which points to a gap between curriculum intent and classroom practice that future implementation efforts will need to close.

Balancing Receptive and Productive Skills

Receptive skills also remain central. Rahmanu and Molnár [15] focus on listening and reading needs in vocational higher education, illustrating that students must be able to understand spoken instructions, technical explanations, manuals, policies, and other information before they can respond effectively. A complete employability-oriented model therefore needs a balance between understanding information and producing clear professional communication, a balance that carries directly into the pedagogical choices discussed in Section IV.

PEDAGOGICAL AND DIGITAL APPROACHES

A major implication of the reviewed literature is that technical English is more meaningful when students learn through realistic tasks and appropriately supported digital tools. This section examines six pedagogical and digital strands identified across the reviewed studies.

Project-Based Learning

Hsu, Su, and Su [14] examine project-based learning in ESP for engineering education, demonstrating the value of connecting language practice with technical projects. A project can require learners to read technical sources, discuss a problem, divide responsibilities, prepare documentation, and present a solution, thereby integrating several language skills within one technical context. Because projects typically unfold over several weeks, they also give teachers repeated opportunities to give feedback on the same piece of communicative work as it develops, rather than assessing isolated exercises.

Task-Based Learning

Task-based learning provides a similar bridge between language and occupational practice. Amante [18] uses authentic accounting tasks as the basis for ESP instruction, showing how language can be developed while learners perform discipline-related activities. In a polytechnic programme, comparable tasks might include preparing a maintenance report, writing a troubleshooting note, explaining a machine process, creating a user guide, handling a simulated customer query, or presenting a project outcome. The common thread across project- and task-based approaches is that language is practised as a means of accomplishing a recognisable professional goal rather than as an end in itself.

Web-Based and Digital Learning Platforms

Digital learning platforms can expand access to such practice. Rossydi et al. [12] report on a web-based English learning platform for vocational education, supporting the

use of digital environments for repeated practice and flexible learning. A well-designed platform can provide technical reading materials, listening activities, model documents, vocabulary practice, quizzes, discussion tasks, and opportunities to submit recorded presentations or written work. Such platforms are particularly useful for addressing the variation in learner proficiency noted in Section VI, since they allow students to revisit material and practise at their own pace outside scheduled class time.

Artificial Intelligence in Technical English

Artificial intelligence adds another layer to Technical English. Zainuddin, Mat Daud, and Hussein [17] examine polytechnic students' acceptance and use of AI tools, indicating that adoption depends on more than the existence of technology. Institutions need to consider usability, student attitudes, task purpose, teacher guidance, and the quality of learning support provided through AI tools. Their use of PLS-SEM modelling to identify the specific factors that predict acceptance also suggests that AI adoption strategies may need to be tailored to institutional and student characteristics rather than assumed to work uniformly across contexts.

Digital and Online Communication Competence

Professional digital communication also needs attention because online language practices are increasingly part of how students learn and interact. Omotayo-Olotu et al. [6] highlight the importance of digital language practices, supporting activities that develop audience awareness, appropriate online communication, and responsible use of digital language resources. The emergence of AI should be treated as a change in learning practice rather than a replacement for language learning: Aina et al. [9] place AI within the wider future of English language teaching and highlight the need to prepare teachers and learners for technology-supported language education, rather than treating specific tools as a fixed endpoint.

Intercultural Technical Communication

Intercultural competence should also be built into technical communication. Liu et al. [8] show that technical communication in cross-border contexts can require adaptation to cultural and audience differences. Polytechnic learners increasingly need to communicate through digital platforms, international teams, supply chains, and customer networks, making audience-sensitive communication an employability skill rather than an optional extension of English. Their use of a Fuzzy Delphi approach to build expert consensus around this module also offers a transferable method for other institutions seeking to design

intercultural content collaboratively with industry stakeholders.

Table 2. Suggested Structure for an Employability-Oriented Polytechnic English Curriculum

Curriculum Area	Core Content	Example Activity	Assessment Evidence
Foundational English	Core grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking, writing	Diagnostic tasks and guided practice	Baseline and progress evidence
Discipline-specific English	Technical terminology, field-specific texts and language functions	Manual reading, glossary building, terminology practice	Technical vocabulary and comprehension
Technical communication	Reports, instructions, emails, presentations and documentation	Project report and technical presentation	Written and oral performance rubric
Employability English	Interviews, teamwork, workplace etiquette and customer interaction	Mock interview, role-play and team briefing	Observed communication and reflection
Digital communication	Online writing, multimedia communication and responsible AI use	Digital portfolio, AI-assisted revision with verification	Digital portfolio and source-checking evidence
Intercultural communication	Audience awareness, tone, adaptation and professional interaction	Cross-cultural workplace simulation	Audience-appropriate message and reflection

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Alongside its areas of agreement, the reviewed literature identifies a consistent set of implementation challenges that institutions must address if employability-oriented English is to be delivered effectively.

The first challenge is variation in learner proficiency and educational background. Polytechnic students may begin with very different levels of English, and a single course pace can create difficulty for both lower- and higher-proficiency learners. Jahan [7] draws attention to curriculum

effectiveness and student outcomes in polytechnic ELT, showing why curriculum decisions need to account for the realities of the institutional teaching context.

A second challenge is limited exposure to authentic workplace communication. English courses may focus heavily on grammar, textbook exercises, or general topics while students receive too little practice with the genres and interaction patterns of technical employment. Luo et al. [19] demonstrate the value of an explicit technical communication module, suggesting that workplace-oriented communication should be planned rather than left as an incidental outcome.

A third challenge concerns curriculum time and programme coordination. Sari [13] shows why the place and continuity of English within a polytechnic curriculum matter. Short or disconnected periods of instruction can make it difficult to develop communication competence progressively. English teachers and technical subject teachers can therefore benefit from coordination around shared projects, terminology, documentation, and assessment expectations.

A fourth challenge is teacher readiness for interdisciplinary teaching and digital change. Teachers may need stronger familiarity with technical genres, occupational communication, online platforms, and AI-supported learning. Rossydi et al. [12] indicate the potential of web-based learning, but digital implementation also requires access, support, and appropriate learning design rather than technology alone.

A fifth challenge is the responsible use of AI. AI tools can assist with drafting, explanation, vocabulary, and feedback, but students still need to check accuracy, understand technical content, and develop independent communication ability. Zainuddin et al. [17] make student acceptance an important consideration, which means future implementation should combine technology adoption with pedagogical guidance and responsible use practices.

Table 3. Key Implementation Challenges and Institutional Responses

Challenge	Suggested Institutional Response	Related Studies
Variation in learner proficiency	Diagnostic placement, differentiated pacing, and platform-supported self-paced practice.	[7]

Limited authentic workplace exposure	Explicit technical-communication modules built around real genres and tasks.	[19]
Curriculum time and coordination	Joint planning between English and technical departments; shared projects and assessment criteria.	[13]
Teacher readiness	Professional development in technical genres, digital platforms, and AI-supported pedagogy.	[12]
Responsible AI use	Clear usage guidelines, verification practices, and staged introduction of AI tools.	[17]

CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature indicates that English language development in polytechnic education is most effective when it is closely connected to technical study, workplace communication, and employability. Technical communication should therefore be treated as a practical competence that includes reading and listening to technical information, writing professional documents, explaining procedures, presenting ideas, interacting with others, and adapting communication to audiences.

Discipline-focused curriculum planning is equally important. Romadhon et al. [3] demonstrate why English content should reflect the specific communication demands of technical programmes. Project- and task-based approaches can then make this content authentic, while digital tools can extend opportunities for practice and feedback.

The literature also supports a shift from generic English toward needs-based ESP. Yacoub [10] provides a clear basis for this approach through systematic needs analysis, showing why syllabus content should be based on the language functions and tasks required in the target field.

The discussion in Section V indicates that these priorities are broadly convergent across the reviewed literature, even though the studies differ in scale, method, and disciplinary focus. Translating this convergence into practice, as Section VII discusses, requires coordinated action from institutions, teachers, students, and employers rather than curriculum change alone.

An employability-oriented Polytechnic English curriculum should consequently integrate foundational language, discipline-specific English, technical

communication, soft skills, digital competence, intercultural awareness, and authentic assessment. The goal is not simply to produce students who know English rules, but graduates who can use English effectively while performing technical and professional responsibilities.

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