

# Communicative Needs in Professional English Course: Learner Diversity in TVET Education

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## ABSTRACT

In response to the lack of proficiency in English amongst Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates, various communication courses are introduced in tertiary institutions as part of the curriculum to tackle more authentic and applicable English use in the workplace. Considering the high demand for such courses, it is crucial to identify the specific needs of a diverse range of learners to effectively deliver the courses. This study explores the communicative needs of 112 students enrolling in a communication course in one of public universities that offers TVET programs in Malaysia. The primary objectives of this study are to explore learners' present and future needs in professional communication in four skills-listening, writing, reading, and speaking and identify the learners' learning strategies. The findings found interesting trend on TVET students' preference in receptive skills which are listening and reading. This could be explained by the fact that the nature of TVET courses which primarily centred on understanding instructions and manuals. Moreover, the learner diversity in terms of learning strategies employed by the students when learning English are also explored in present study. The findings provide more effective pedagogical approach for instructors who teach similar courses. Not only that, this study could also provide insights in understanding diverse learners' needs and strategies in learning a communication course so that successful courses could be designed and delivered.

**Keywords:** Communication course, learning strategies, needs analysis, TVET.

## INTRODUCTION

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a special branch in Malaysian education which was developed in response to the National Education Master Plan 2006-2010. According to Alias and Hassan (2013), the primary goal of TVET is to promote equal access, equity, and quality education for technical and vocational students to ensure that they are equipped with life skills and learning. In a compiled scholarly work on TVET published by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education, Mazlan *et al.* (2015) projected that TVET graduates are expected to bridge the gap between economic growth through human capital. With such high expectations and emphasis on TVET, it is imperative that more studies should involve TVET students not only because the branch is relatively new, but also due to the fact that TVET graduates may come from diverse backgrounds, skills, and opportunities. Not only these TVET students are expected to be highly skilled in technical field, but they also need to possess strong communicative skills, particularly English to be able to perform at workplace. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the communicative needs of these TVET students in a Professional English course.

To ensure the success of any language course, needs analysis is important to understand the learners' language needs and level. Long (2005) highlights the importance of creating a needs analysis in any language programs or curriculum that will lead to the design of tasks, topics covered, classroom activities and even assessments.

Needs analysis can be defined as the process of collecting information as a foundation before designing a curriculum (Iwai *et al.*, 1999). According to Van Den Branden *et al.* (2009), needs analysis is a recognized initial step in any language program to acknowledge the distinctions between each student individually and seek to determine their own language demands. Similarly, Fan *et al.* (2025) highlight the necessity of needs analysis in courses to better fit into the program. Therefore, acquiring comprehensive information about the diversity of learners is extremely crucial to create an effective language program.

### **Problem Statement**

With the use of English as lingua franca and arguably, an essential language for international and multinational corporations, it is indisputable that many English Professional courses are being offered. This is supported by Missingham (2006), who found that linguistic skills, particularly Professional English skills, together with technical skills, are essential skills that should be acquired by all professional engineers. This is based on the premise that Professional English skills are part of communicative competence that could determine success at work.

According to Missingham (2006) professional communication skills are linguistic skills based on several creeds such as teamwork, ethics, sustainability, and social justice. In other words, these creeds are demonstrated through classroom activities with the emphasis of professional English language. In many countries, such efforts were not foreign. It is reported that, professional English courses have been introduced as part of engineering education at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) since 2002 (Missingham, 2006). A study conducted at Carlton University found that professional English courses provide necessary skills for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students to transition from academic to work environment (Artemeva *et al.*, 1999). Similarly, a study found a dire need for English professional communication skills amongst engineering graduates in Nepal (Shrestha *et al.*, 2016). Employers and TVET stakeholders have reported inadequate command of English language amongst TVET graduates which can affect on the hiring and workplace performance (Suhaili *et al.*, 2025; Nesaratnam *et al.*, 2020).

Whilst many countries have started conducting needs analysis on English Professional communication courses, there is a general paucity of literature that focuses on the contemporary Malaysian context. According to Heinrichs (2016) a more contemporary needs analysis is needed to ensure that the teaching materials and activities are tallying to the needs of contemporary learners considering their diverse backgrounds and characteristics. This is supported by Menggo *et al.* (2019) who highlight more recent needs analyses to inquire what the learners' wants and lack so that more comprehensive language program can be designed to promote the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. Therefore, this study is set out to gain a better understanding on the more contemporary needs analysis of students who are enrolled in professional English course at a public technical university in Malaysia. As such, the empirical evidence based on the needs analysis could give educators invaluable insights into the traits, preferences, and needs of students, enabling them to create inclusive and efficient instructional strategies that take into account a variety of learning strategies, ultimately encouraging greater understanding and engagement among students. Hence, the purpose of the study are:

1. To determine the language skill that the learners perceived as important.
2. To examine whether there are differences in learners' perception of the importance of language skills across various faculties.
3. To identify the specific language tasks within different language skills that learners perceived as important.
4. To analyse the learners' preferred learning strategies when learning English.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Needs Analysis for TVET Programs**

With the advent of new trends in language teaching especially in specific contexts such as English for Professional Communication, Orr (2001) once wrote in an article that language education should be viewed as

an amalgamation of different components (i.e., social, academic, and work contexts) in lieu of a monolithic system. He also emphasized on the crucial role of needs analysis as a preliminary step to provide necessary details for the construction of the language program that will further determine the course design, material selection, teaching process and finally the assessments. As needs analysis is important, this section will review different literature recorded on needs analysis of contemporary Professional Communication courses. When investigating needs analysis, it is crucial to consider different stakeholders such as learners, employers/industry, government, and academia (educational institution). In this section, a discussion on needs analysis from the point of views of different stakeholders will be summarized.

From the students’ perspective, as future engineers, it is reported that most would like to learn language skills and tasks that will help them to perform in career (Devi & Raus, 2011; Spencer & Liu, 2013; Majid *et al.*, 2023). For instance, securing a job interview and getting career advancements. In a study, Devi and Raus (2011) conducted a needs analysis amongst 326 engineering students at a technical university in Malaysia and found that the respondents expressed their interests to improve their grammar and job interview tasks especially in mock job interview and preparing documents such as cover letter and resume. This reflects the needs from the learners’ perspective. A study by Spencer and Liu (2013) in which the questionnaire adapted in this study investigated needs analysis amongst process integration engineers in Taiwan and found interesting findings. The findings revealed that the engineers use reading and writing tasks on a daily basis and expressed high anxiety when having to deal with listening and speaking tasks, particularly with interlocutors with accented English. The study also found Professional English to be useful not only for daily work as an engineer but also for career advancement (i.e., promotion and bonuses) and job opportunities.

In a comprehensive doctoral thesis on Malaysian Professional Communication Skills, Tajuddin (2015) created a framework based on different stakeholders including employers, government, and tertiary institutions. One of the important findings drawn from the thesis is the dire need to prepare Malaysian graduates with more authentic scenarios such as engaging in appropriate verbal interactions with colleagues, contributing to the ease of interactions through effective non-verbal communication and executing different language tasks including writing memo, emails, and professional documents. A summary of different language tasks highlighted by Tajuddin (2015, p.159) can be seen in Table 1 as per below.

Table 1. Summary of tasks in different language skills useful in workplace

<b>Language Skill</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Example of Tasks</b>
Speaking	Contribute to productive and appropriate verbal interactions at workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inform audience (superiors, colleagues, and clients) in an enlightening manner.</li> <li>● Contributing ideas and give opinions in group discussions.</li> <li>● Persuade superiors, colleagues, and clients to accept ideas and opinions using well-defined explanations.</li> <li>● Use specialist vocabulary in a correct manner.</li> <li>● Give clear instructions to solve issues at work.</li> <li>● Initiating contact, requesting information on the telephone.</li> <li>● Seeking information from others at work.</li> <li>● Responding to enquiries/problems from superior/clients.</li> <li>● State reasons for disagreeing without interrupting the speech of colleagues or superiors.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussion work schedules and procedures.</li> <li>● Engage small talks with superior, colleagues and clients informally.</li> <li>● Telephone conversations skill – answering inquiries, giving instructions.</li> </ul>
Writing	Contribute to effective execution of tasks at work and making the workflow efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Filling in forms.</li> <li>● Write memo.</li> <li>● Write formal business letter.</li> <li>● Write minutes of meeting.</li> <li>● Write a summary of articles.</li> <li>● Write for the company’s website.</li> <li>● Write formal/informal email messages.</li> <li>● Write items for newsletter.</li> <li>● Write reports using office template.</li> </ul>
Listening	Contribute to successful working relationships and effective execution of tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ask if one does not understand instruction by superior, colleagues and clients.</li> <li>● Disagree politely if better ideas can be brought up during meetings and negotiation.</li> <li>● Respond appropriately (speech or non-verbal communication) after understanding the instructions, questions, etc. from superior, colleague.</li> <li>● Fully comprehend what is going on around them at workplace.</li> <li>● Give feedback when asked by colleagues, superior and clients after fully understanding the situation.</li> <li>● Responds to clients’ complaints.</li> <li>● Understanding others during briefings, seminars, conferences, and presentations.</li> </ul>
Reading	Contribute to proficient job execution and high-quality results at workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read official job-related forms before signing.</li> <li>● Read own work contracts.</li> <li>● Read business reports and agreements.</li> <li>● Read office memo and notices.</li> <li>● Read email messages, fax, and formal letters.</li> <li>● Read technical manuals.</li> <li>● Read agenda and minutes of meetings.</li> <li>● Read work related books and articles.</li> </ul>

## Learning Strategies

Liang (2009) mentions that knowing learners’ learning strategy will help the educators to improve on the learning acquisition. In the beginning of the study on learning strategy, Weinstein and Mayer (1983) defined learning strategy as tactics in knowing learners’ preference that might affect on the learners’ motivation and other affective filters. O’Neil (2014) offers a comprehensive analysis on learning strategies and highlighted that studies in learning strategies provide framework and action plans for educators to teach the students how to learn. It is also highlighted in the book that learning strategies is heavily depended on individual differences. Besides than cognitive factors like information storage and retrieval abilities, knowing one’s learning preference and strategies will greatly help the students to improve their learning. Knowing what works best for them will provide optimum learning process. In many needs analysis questionnaires, many researchers include learning strategies as part of the items in the questionnaire, including Aliki (2021). In the article, Aliki (2021) mentions that the results from the needs analysis contributed to design better learning experience for the students. With that being the case, present study will also investigate the participants’ learning strategies in order to create a better English class.

A conceptual framework was developed based on the literature. The hypotheses are:

- H1: There is a significant difference in learners’ perception of the importance of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).
- H2: There is a significant difference in learners’ perception of the importance of language skills across various faculties.
- H3: There is a significant difference in learners’ perception of the importance of language tasks within different language skills.
- H4: There is a significant difference in the preferred learning strategies among learners when learning English.

Fig. 1 describes the conceptual framework of this study. Following Mat Kilau (2001) the grounded this study intends to investigate which language skills and language tasks were considered as important among the learners in TVET program (H1 and H3 respectively) and whether there is any significant difference of perception among learners from various faculties (H2). Finally, this study attempts to explore the preferred learning methods used by the learners to acquire English (H4). Language skills refer to the skills and abilities necessary to communicate and express oneself in a specific language. In our study, language skills cover the four main components in English language teaching and learning- listening, speaking, reading, and writing. On the other hand, language tasks involve the use and application of language skills to enhance different aspects of language proficiency.

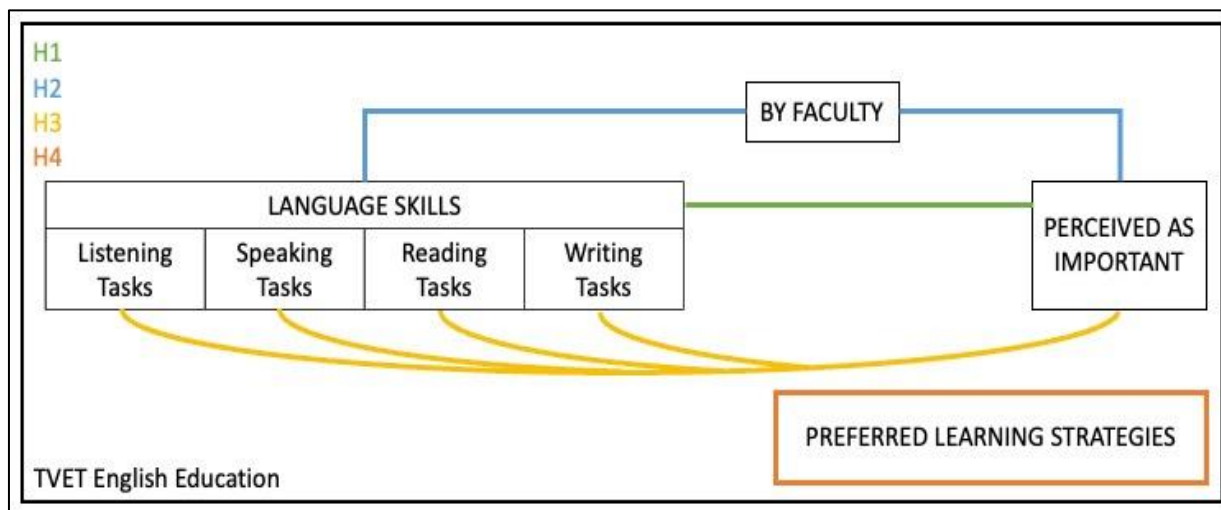


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of this study

## METHODS

### Research Design and Setting

This study employs a quantitative method by means of survey. Convenience sampling was employed to ensure efficient data collection across different faculties. This study was conducted among undergraduate students at one of the Malaysian public universities that offers TVET programs.

### Research Questions

The study sets out to answer the following questions:

1. Amongst the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, writing, and reading, which is the skill that is considered as important among the learners?
2. Does the preferred language skill vary among different faculties?
3. Which language tasks in different language skills that the learners perceived as important?
4. What are the students' preferred learning strategies when learning English?

### Participants

A total of 112 students participated in this study. The participants are technical students at a public university who are enrolled in the English for Professional Communication course. Initially, the study was able to collect 175 participants, but 63 students did not complete all the survey questions. Therefore, only 112 out of 175 responses were used for this study. The participants are Malaysian students from different backgrounds and regions. The participants also come from multiple faculties as seen in Table 2. Access to participants varies across faculties due to the availability of the students on campus during the data collection. This explains why there is a low number of students from Faculty of Computing, Faculty of Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technology, and Faculty of Mechanical and Automotive Engineering Technology.

The participants have completed three levels of English courses prior to enrolling in the current course that is, English for Professional Communication. Most students have completed their Malaysian University English Test (MUET) and their results ranged between Band 2 and Band 5 with the majority scoring Band 3.

Table 2. Participants' faculty (N=112)

Faculty	Number of Students
Centre for Mathematical Sciences	8
Faculty of Chemical and Process Engineering Technology	24
Faculty of Civil Engineering Technology	20
Faculty of Computing	2
Faculty of Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technology	3
Faculty of Industrial Management	17
Faculty of Industrial Sciences and Technology	35
Faculty of Mechanical and Automotive Engineering Technology	3

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through an online survey distributed to current students who are enrolling in the English for Professional Communication course. The data collection took around two weeks, then later the ordinal data was analyzed through IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 29.0 software.

**Instrument**

This study utilizes the quantitative method by administering an online survey to students who are enrolling in the English for Professional Communication course. The survey consists of six parts. Part 1 inquires on the students’ demographic details, including gender, year of study, faculty and MUET result. The second part presents different language tasks in listening skill and the students were asked to rate the importance of learning the tasks in the course with 5-point Likert Scale (ranging from 1=least important to 5=most important). Similarly, the third, fourth and fifth parts require the students to rate language tasks in speaking, writing, and reading respectively. The language tasks in all four skills are adapted from Spence and Liu (2013). Finally, the sixth part probes on the students’ preferred learning strategies. The questions in this part are adapted from Aliko (2021). This study adapts from Spence and Liu (2013) and Aliko (2021) due to the framework established from the two studies. Not only that, the similar context between Taiwanese and Malaysia in terms of the role of English in the two countries and the use of English for employability is also another reason for the replication.

To analyze the data for the present study, Fig. 2 illustrates the interpretations of the scale from 1.000 to 5.000 using Landell (1997)’s statistical mean interpretation. The cut-off value for this study is 3.000. Therefore, any of the statements in the questionnaire that is above 3.000 is considered as more important, whereas any statement below 3.000 is considered as less important. According to a systematic literature study by Mohd Rokeman (2024), 5-point Likert Scale is a good choice in terms of reliability and construct validity.

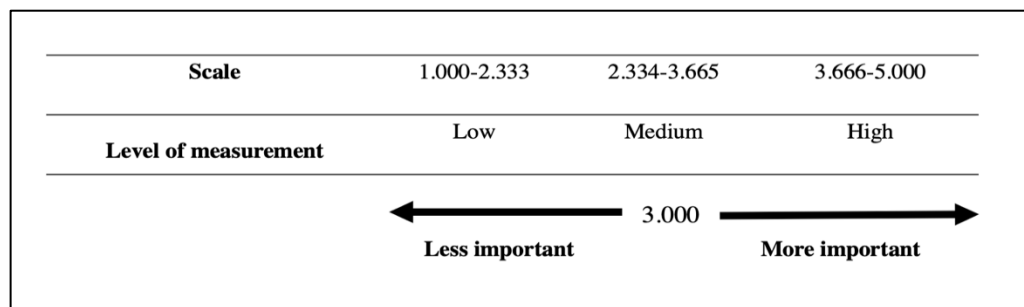


Figure 2. Scale measurement and cut-off value

**Reliability of the Instrument**

To measure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted prior to data collection. According to Heigham and Croker (2009), a pilot study allows the researchers to reflect on the methodologies and procedures before the actual data collection. Not only that, one of the main objectives of conducting a pilot study is to affirm the reliability of the instrument used. To do that, Cronbach Alpha reading was acquired from the pilot study’s data. It is found that the reliability coefficient of the pilot study was 0.9538. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) reported that in order for an instrument to be considered as reliable, the Cronbach Alpha reading should be above 0.7000. Since the Cronbach Alpha reading is 0.9538, it can be concluded that the instrument used is highly reliable.

**RESULTS**

**Research Question 1: Amongst the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, writing, and reading, which is the skill that is considered as important among the learners?**

To answer the first research question, the overall means for each skill together with the standard deviation were tabulated in Table 3. To further indicate the statistical difference between the skills, ANOVA test was conducted as illustrated in Table 4.

It is found that listening skill is the skill that the learners perceived as the most important (M=4.643, SD=0.368). This is followed by reading (M=4.521, SD=0.561), writing (M=4.485, SD=0.511) and speaking (M=4.280, SD=0.707). It is also interesting to note that all four skills are rated more than 3.000 out of 5.000. As mentioned, the cut-off value for the questionnaire is 3.000. Since all four skills are rated between 4.280 to 4.643, it can be suggested that all four skills are perceived as important amongst the students.

Table 3. Overall means for all language tasks based on skills (N=112)

Skill	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Listening	4.643	0.368
Speaking	4.280	0.707
Writing	4.485	0.511
Reading	4.521	0.561

A one-way ANOVA test was computed to compare the overall means based on the four skills. It is found that there is significant difference on the overall means based on all skills- listening, speaking, writing, and reading with the p-value <0.05 as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA test for the overall means based on skills (N=112)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Between groups	41.993	3	13.998	24.501	1.252E-15
Within groups	1469.388	2572	0.571		
Total	1511.382	2575			

**Research Question 2: Does the preferred language skill vary among different faculties?**

Based on the findings from the first research question, the researchers are intrigued to know whether the skill that the learners found most important varies across faculty. To answer this research question, the data is sorted according to eight different faculties with their respective means and standard deviation in all four skills as seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Analysis based on faculty and the four language skills

Faculty	Listening		Speaking		Writing		Reading	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Centre for Mathematical Sciences	4.458	0.586	4.031	0.777	4.214	0.774	4.500	0.528
Faculty of Chemical and Process Engineering Technology	4.667	0.538	4.427	0.723	4.631	0.505	4.592	0.669
Faculty of Civil Engineering Technology	4.583	0.641	4.16	0.678	4.307	0.683	4.280	0.776
Faculty of Computing	5.000	0	4.75	0	4.929	0.101	5.000	0

Faculty of Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technology	4.667	0.333	4.125	0.768	4.286	0.698	4.467	0.777
Faculty of Industrial Management	4.647	0.635	4.346	0.829	4.454	0.92	4.447	0.983
Faculty of Industrial Sciences and Technology	4.676	0.61	4.243	0.79	4.543	0.675	4.617	0.667
Faculty of Mechanical and Automotive Engineering Technology	4.667	0.577	4.458	0.938	4.619	0.577	4.667	0.577

From all eight faculties, it is evident from the table above that all faculties except Centre for Mathematical Sciences rated listening as the most important skill out of the four skills. The students from Centre for Mathematical Sciences rated reading skill as the most important (M= 4.500, SD= 0.528). It is also interesting to note that students from the Faculty of Computing rated two skills- listening and reading as the most important skills (M=5.000, SD=0). The perfect mean 5.000 could be reasoned out because there were only two students from the faculty who responded to the survey. Therefore, it is suggested that one student rated listening skill as more important, whereas another student rated reading skill as more important. All in all, students from seven faculties agreed that listening is the most important skill in their future profession.

To further analyse this, a one-way ANOVA was computed to see the statistical difference between the four skills as seen in Table 6. For all four skills, it is reported that the p-value is recorded less than 0.05, which indicated statistical difference.

Table 6. One-way ANOVA results according to faculty and language skills

Skill	Sum of Squares Between	Sum of Squares Within	df between	df within	F-value	P-value
Listening	2.946	8.221	7	104	2.111	0.023
Speaking	2.670	1.220	7	104	2.511	0.008
Writing	3.083	3.620	7	104	2.115	2.686E-07
Reading	1.838	1.932	7	104	2.205	0.008

**Research Question 3: Which language tasks in different language skills that the learners perceived as important?**

To answer this question, the data from the questionnaire in Part 2, 3, 4, and 5 were utilized. The overall means and standard deviation for all four skills- listening, speaking, writing, and reading are tabulated in the following tables.

Table 7. Means and standard deviations of language tasks for listening skill

No	Task	Mean	SD
1	Understanding spoken instructions at workplace	4.679	0.588
2	Understanding meetings	4.723	0.557
3	Listening in international seminars/conferences	4.527	0.657
Overall Means for Listening Skill		4.643	

For listening skills, the learners rated the task understanding meeting content ( $M=4.723$ ,  $SD=0.557$ ) as the highest importance as compared to the other two tasks. However, the other two listening tasks are also rated quite highly ( $M=4.679$ ,  $SD=0.588$ ) for understanding instructions and listening at seminar/conference ( $M=4.527$ ,  $SD=0.657$ ). This explains the high overall means ( $M=4.643$ ) for all three listening related tasks.

Table 8. Means and standard deviations of language tasks for speaking skill

No	Task	Mean	SD
1	Going for a job interview	4.786	0.412
2	Present yourself in a video resume to apply for jobs	4.518	0.614
3	Giving oral presentation in front of boss/clients	4.464	0.859
4	Giving opinions at a meeting/seminar	4.357	0.708
5	Speaking to colleagues about everyday work tasks and duties	3.990	0.915
6	Having informal and social conversation with your colleagues	3.800	0.909
7	Having telephone communication with colleagues/clients/boss	4.000	0.959
8	Having online meetings using different platforms such as Google Meet, MS Teams and Zoom with colleagues/clients/boss	4.320	0.762
Overall Means for Speaking Skill		4.28	

As for speaking tasks, the highest mean is going for a job interview ( $M=4.786$ ,  $SD=0.412$ ). On the other hand, the lowest rated speaking task is using English for social conversation with colleagues ( $M=3.800$ ,  $SD=0.909$ ). The overall means for speaking tasks is 4.28.

Table 9. Means and standard deviations of language tasks for writing skill

No	Task	Mean	SD
1	Writing emails	4.527	0.697
2	Writing minutes of meeting	4.402	0.832
3	Writing daily/weekly reports	4.420	0.779
4	Writing proposals for projects	4.643	0.613
5	Writing business letters (Example: cover letter, formal letters)	4.625	0.686
6	Writing memos	4.304	0.695
7	Writing presentation slides	4.473	0.629
Overall Means for Writing Skill		4.485	

The overall means for writing skill tasks are quite high ( $M=4.485$ ). The above seven writing tasks are rated, and the students rated writing project proposal ( $M=4.643$ ,  $SD=0.613$ ) as the most important task. On the other hand, the lowest mean for writing task is writing memos ( $M=4.304$ ,  $SD=0.695$ ).

Table 10. Means and standard deviations of language tasks for reading skill

No	Task	Mean	SD
1	Understanding written instructions/manual	4.625	0.659
2	Reading project documents	4.634	0.684
3	Reading office documents	4.500	0.771
4	Reading professional texts	4.536	0.722
5	Reading online resources (Example: Google Scholar, E-book)	4.313	0.86
Overall Mean for Reading Skill		4.521	

The students were presented with five reading tasks as illustrated in Table 10. From tasks, the highest mean is reading project documents (M=4.634, SD=0.684) whereas the lowest mean is using English to read online resources (M=4.313, SD=0.86).

**Research Question 4: What are the students’ preferred learning strategies when learning English?**

For the last research question, students were presented with different learning strategies and asked on their preference when learning English as seen in Table 10. From the list provided, the students rated all 11 strategies more than 4.000 except for Strategy 9, playing language games (M=3.964, SD=0.9151). Overall, the students rated Strategy 4, using dictionary or online sources to find word meanings (M=4.563, SD=0.6685) as their preferred learning strategy.

Table 11. Preferred learning strategies

Learning Strategy	Mean	SD
Memorize a list of vocabulary	4.045	0.8907
Conversation with native speakers	4.286	0.7483
Using songs or other audio sources like podcast/Spotify	4.304	0.8606
Use dictionary/online sources to look for meanings	4.563	0.6685
Conversation in English with friends	4.375	0.7753
Doing grammar practices	4.304	0.8414
Group discussions	4.33	0.8460
Watching visual sources such as YouTube videos/ Netflix	4.464	0.7099
Playing language games (Example: Video game/ mobile game/virtual reality game)	3.964	0.9151
Reading online sources (Journal articles/papers/Google Scholar, Online library)	4.375	0.8026
Reading physical books (Hardcopy books)	4.188	0.9159

A one-way ANOVA test was also computed to compare the overall means of all 11 learning strategies as illustrated in Table 12 below. The results showed that there were significant differences on the overall means of learning strategies.

Table 12. ANOVA on the preferred learning strategies

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Between groups	33.364	10	3.336	5.259	1.32E-07
Within groups	774.607	1221	0.634		
Total	807.971	1231			

## DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the present study, several interesting discoveries will be further discussed in this section. Firstly, the discussion on which skill is considered as important in workplace will be discussed. Next, this section will discuss on the learners’ preferences in learning English.

### Listening skill is the most important skill in workplace?

The findings revealed that the students rated listening skill as the most important skill to acquire in the workplace. This is consistent and evident as the majority of students from all different fields of studies-seven out of eight faculties agreed that listening skill is crucial. This is interesting because the findings concur with several other studies. In a study conducted with the industries, several workers are asked to rate different skills amongst Malaysian graduates, i.e.- reading, writing, speaking, listening and social, Nair *et al.* (2012) found that speaking skill is rated the lowest in terms of proficiency, whereas listening skill is rated as the highest. Similarly, Salam *et al.* (2022) also found that Malaysian fresh medical graduates lack of listening skill which is extremely important especially in the healthcare system. According to Hahn (2018), listening skill is a skill that is often misunderstood as an easy skill to acquire out of the four skills. Many instructors often think that by simply exposing the students to spoken English would automatically help students to acquire the skill, but to successfully acquire listening skill is more than that. Complex procedures, instructions, and technical discussions are frequently found in technical and engineering professions. For correctly understanding and applying these technical instructions, good listening skills are essential. Since the students are from TVET programs which are mainly technical and engineering background, they are aware that being able to listen intently is essential to understanding complex material, paying close attention to directions, and successfully completing technical tasks. This is supported by Zeleke *et al.* (2023) that found that TVET students rated highly in listening tasks as it is embedded in TVET curriculum.

The findings, however, contradict other studies that reported from the view of employers and industries. Unlike to present study, Salleh *et al.* (2015) found that the employers are unsatisfied with Malaysian graduates’ speaking skills, especially in oral presentations. The employers also rated speaking skill as the most important skill to acquire in the workplace. In another study, Heang *et al.* (2019) studied thousands of job advertisements across field in the Jobstreet portal, a well-known portal for job seeking in Malaysia. It is found that presentation skill is required in more than half of the advertisements in the portal which makes it as the highly demanded skill. On the other hand, effective listening is placed the eighth highest skill needed as advertised in the job advertisements. This study is ground-breaking as there seems to be a discrepancy between what the industry/workplace demands and what is considered as important by the graduates. Similar finding also reported by Zakaria (2017) who reports that there is a mismatch between graduates’ expectations and acquired skills with the skills demanded by the industry. Not only that, from the academic’s perspective, it is revealed that the educators and staff members attest to the lack of proficiency of the students. In a study to inquire TVET staff members’ perception towards the students’ English proficiency, Stander *et al.* (2022) reveal that the staff members think that the students have the fear of communicating the languages. To concur to that, a study by Ismail *et al.* (2018) revealed that TVET teachers find it difficult to teach English to the students due to their lack of proficiency in English, particularly writing and speaking.

All in all, the students’ preference for listening abilities is in line with what certain industries want. Many jobs such as healthcare demand that individuals have excellent listening skills to comprehend the demands of clients,

customers, coworkers, or superiors, respond correctly, and deliver quality services (Salam *et al.*, 2022). Students who understand the value of listening in these situations may give listening skill development priority in order to improve their employability. Moving forward, it is highly important to ensure that the education system is providing the important skills demanded by the industry. Heang *et al.* (2019) point out that the high unemployment rate in Malaysia could derive from the mismatch of the skills perceived as important by the job seekers versus what the employers are looking for. Therefore, by getting informed on the statistics and data from present study on what the students consider as important is crucial so that the educators can inform them what skills are demanded by the industry.

### Preferred learning strategies

The findings from the final research question can suggest the learning preference amongst students from younger generation. It is suggested that most of the learners' view finding the meaning of words from the dictionary/online sources as the most effective strategy for them to learn English. The comprehension of concepts and terminology is precise and accurate in technical and engineering areas. Learners can learn precise meanings and word usage in context thorough definitions and explanations provided by dictionaries and internet resources. Because of this, using dictionaries is an appealing tactic for these learners because technical disciplines require accuracy and detail. Hence, educators can take this information as an opportunity to further improve their teaching approaches. For example, educators can allocate some time for the students to search for meanings of words that they do not know before starting any language tasks. This might help the learners to perform better as they are more confident after understanding the words in context. Tahir *et al.* (2020) reported that teaching vocabulary explicitly significantly improves students' learning. The findings also consistent with another study by Alamri and Rogers (2018) who found explicit method in vocabulary teaching more efficient. The findings are interesting as another study by Damio *et al.* (2024) found differently. The study found that UiTM students prefer using YouTube as the main platform to study English. Not only that, John and Lo (2024) also found opposite findings in which most participants prefer using mobile application when learning a language.

This information is crucial as it helps educators to better create the learning materials, class activities and appropriate assessments for the students. The amount of time allotted for the teaching and learning process does not determine how effective a method is; rather, it is more crucial to consider how, why, and with whom the method is employed (Badjadi, 2020). This is because Afshar *et al.* (2019) argue that understanding learners instructional needs and preferences would determine the success of learning. Moreover, countless readings have reported that the younger generations have different preferences and approaches in language learning including one from Chillakuri and Mahanandia (2018) and later stress on the importance of taking note on the learners' needs and preferences. Therefore, the findings from present study are useful for the educators who are teaching English for Professional Communication.

### Limitations and Implications

There are several limitations of this study. Firstly, in terms of the generalizability of the findings. One hundred and twelve undergraduate students who were enrolled in a communication course at a public institution in Malaysia participated in the current study. Not only that, the sampling technique is limited to convenience sampling rather than stratified random sampling. The results might not accurately reflect all TVET students at various institutions or localities. As a result, care should be taken when extrapolating the findings to broader populations. Secondly, the study only used data that participants voluntarily supplied. Hence, social desirability bias could affect the data that was collected. As a result, the responses from the participants may not precisely reflect their actual communication needs or learning preferences. In order to gain a deeper understanding, future research could examine linguistic abilities and learning strategies and styles utilizing various quantitative or qualitative measurements. Considering the fact that the study was carried out in a particular cultural and educational setting, the variables particular to the TVET system in Malaysia may have an impact on the communication demands and learning strategies described. To determine whether the findings are transferable to other contexts, the study needs to be replicated in other settings. Finally, the findings are only limited to quantitative findings. Future studies may want to include qualitative findings to provide more breadth and depth into the study.

This study emphasizes a number of implications. The results of this study have pedagogical significance for instructors who teach communication courses, particularly for TVET students. The empirical data from this study may help us better comprehend the diverse learners with their own unique requirements and preferences. As a result, instructors may create inclusive environments and more effective teaching materials to improve their learners' communication skills. Moreover, this study provides information to instructors to develop individualized instruction based on the investigation of various learners' learning strategies, allowing instructors to modify their teaching strategies to take into account the various learners' learning strategies and thereby support more efficient and personalized instruction as well as creating inclusive environment for them. Finally, this study aids in the creation of communication courses in TVET programs in terms of curriculum development. Understanding a learner's current and future needs might help a curriculum developer in designing a course that will incorporate the necessary workplace communication demands and equip students with the abilities they will need in the future.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present study aims to identify the most important language skill that the students think would be useful in workplace and found that most students from different faculties rated listening skill as the most important skill. This finding, however, contradicts the skill that employers and industry deem as important-which is speaking or presentation skill. Therefore, this gives the opportunity for educators to inform the students with the expectations from the employers and industry. Not only that, this would help the educators to create better curriculum and syllabus to match the industry's needs with the students' needs. This study also found that vocabulary learning is preferred by the learners. This information can be utilized by the educators to better design the lesson according to the learners' preferences. All in all, the present study was able to present several crucial information about the learners, as one of the main stakeholders in language learning and the findings will be able to be utilized to create a better pedagogical approach.

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