قياس أثر دورات اللغة الإنجليزية للأغراض الخاصة على الكفاءة اللغوية المهنية : دراسة حالة تطبيقية

Assessing the Impact of English for Specific Purposes Training Course on Professional Language Competence: An Applied Case Study

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ملخص الدراسة:

هدفت هذه الدراسة لتوضيح أثر برنامج تدريبي لمدة شهرين في الإنجليزية لأغراض مهنية على الكفاءة اللغوية المهنية والاستعداد العاطفي للموظفين في بيئة مؤسسية. شارك أربعون موظفًا (الأعمار 23–50 سنة؛ ذكور وإناث) من مجموعة النهضة القابضة في عطبرة، السودان، وتلقوا تعليمًا قائمًا على المهام ركّز على المراسلات التجارية وكتابة التقارير والعروض التقديمية والتفاعلات في مكان العمل. وباستخدام تصميم شبه تجريبي قبل–بعد، استُخدم اختبار معرفي مكوّن من 20 بندًا واستبيان مكوّن من 30 بندًا لقياس قلق اللغة والعوائق المتعلقة بالمهام. أظهرت النتائج تحسّنًا كبيرًا في الكفاءة، حيث ارتفع متوسط درجات الاختبار من 52% إلى 84% ($p < .001, d = 2.09$)، وسُجّل انخفاض بنسبة 36% في المشكلات المتعلقة باللغة المبلغ عنها. كانت المكاسب أقوى في الأنماط الكتابية المنظمة، بينما أظهرت المهام الشفوية العفوية تغيرًا معتدلاً لكنه إيجابي. تشير النتائج إلى أن وحدات تدريس

اللغه الإنجلي القصيرة والمستهدفة يمكن أن تُحدث فوائد معرفية وعاطفية ملحوظة، مما يدعم دمجها في برامج التدريب المؤسسي. يقدّم البحث دليلًا تطبيقيًا

من سياق سوق العمل السوداني ويؤكد قيمة تصميم القائم على المهام والحساس للسياق من أجل تنمية لغوية مستدامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنجليزية لأغراض مهنية التواصل في مكان العمل، التعلم القائم على المهام،التدريب المؤسسي، الكفاءة اللغوية

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of a two-month English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training program on employees' professional language competence and affective readiness in a corporate environment. Forty employees (ages 23–50; both males and females) from Alnahda Holding Group in Atbara, Sudan, received task-based instruction focusing on business correspondence, report writing, presentations, and workplace interactions. Using a quasi-experimental pre–post design, the study employed a 20-item knowledge test and a 30-item questionnaire measuring language anxiety and task-related barriers. Results demonstrated substantial improvement in competence, with mean test scores rising from 52% to 84% ($p < .001$, $d = 2.09$), and a 36% reduction in reported language-related problems. Gains were strongest in structured written genres, while spontaneous oral tasks showed moderate but positive change. Findings suggest that short, targeted ESP modules can produce significant cognitive and affective benefits, supporting their integration into corporate training programs. The study contributes applied evidence from a Sudanese workplace context, emphasizing the value of task-based, context-sensitive ESP design for sustainable language development.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); workplace communication; task-based learning; corporate training; language competence.

1.0 Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a vital branch of English Language Teaching (ELT), addressing the professional needs of learners in workplace contexts. Unlike general English, ESP equips learners with targeted communicative skills directly relevant to their fields, bridging the gap between language learning and real-world application. In multilingual organizations, effective English communication is essential for competence, productivity, and collaboration.

Professional language use is often limited by lack of exposure to authentic workplace communication and anxiety in high-stakes contexts. ESP training provides a focused solution by integrating instruction with workplace tasks, enhancing accuracy, fluency, and confidence.

This study examined the impact of ESP training on professional competence through two-months case study at Alnahda Holding Group in Atbara, Sudan. Employees received tailored instruction in business correspondence, report writing, presentations, and workplace interactions. Effectiveness was measured using pre- and post-tests, alongside questionnaires capturing participants' perceptions of relevance, confidence, and reduced anxiety.

By situating the research within Alnahda Holding Group, the study contributed to ESP literature in corporate training, underscoring its role in fostering competence and improving workplace communication. The findings offer practical implications for ESP pedagogy and organizational language policies in Sudan and similar contexts.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Many employees at Alnahda Holding Group demonstrate limited professional English competence, constraining internal communication, productivity, and international collaboration. These challenges are compounded by inadequate exposure to authentic workplace discourse and elevated anxiety when using English in professional contexts. Consequently, employees face difficulties performing communicative tasks such as writing reports, drafting correspondence, and delivering presentations.

This study investigates whether a focused, task-based ESP intervention can yield measurable improvements in employees' workplace language performance and reduce language-related anxiety.

1.2 Background of the Study:

ESP instruction addresses the specific linguistic and communicative requirements of professional domains. It situates language learning within authentic occupational tasks—such as correspondence, report writing, and oral presentations—ensuring that instruction directly supports job performance. In multilingual corporate environments, ESP contributes to organizational efficiency by enhancing clarity, accuracy, and cross-departmental communication. Within the Sudanese context, where English serves as a medium for international commerce and industry collaboration, ESP plays a vital role in equipping employees with the linguistic competence necessary for effective participation in global networks.

1.3 Objectives of the Study:

1. To evaluate the effect of a two-month ESP training program on employees' professional English competence at Alnahda Holding Group.
2. To measure changes in participants' confidence and language-related anxiety following the intervention.
3. To identify which workplace communicative tasks (e.g., correspondence, reports, presentations) show the greatest improvement.
4. To gather participants' perceptions regarding the relevance and applicability of the ESP training.

1.4 Significance of the Study:

1. This study extends ESP scholarship by providing empirical evidence from a corporate training context in Sudan—an under-represented geographical setting in ESP research.
2. It informs organizational language-training policies and supports the design of task-based ESP curricula that target authentic workplace communication needs.
3. It offers practical guidance for instructors and program designers on how to prioritize tasks and reduce communicative anxiety through contextualized, confidence-building instruction.

1.5 Questions of the Study:

1. To what extent does two months of ESP training improve employees' professional English competence at Alnahda Holding Group?
2. How does the ESP program affect participants' confidence in performing workplace communicative tasks?
3. Does the ESP intervention reduce language-related anxiety in professional contexts?
4. Which specific workplace tasks show the largest gains after training?
5. How do participants perceive the relevance and usefulness of the ESP training?

1.6 Hypotheses of the Study:

1. Employees who complete the one-month ESP program will show a statistically significant improvement in professional English competence from pre-test to post-test.

2. Participants will report a significant increase in confidence when performing workplace communicative tasks after the training.

3. Participants will report a significant reduction in language-related anxiety following the ESP intervention.

4. Task-specific gains will vary, with written workplace tasks (e.g., business correspondence, report writing) showing greater improvement than spontaneous oral interactions.

5. There will be no significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores, confidence levels, or anxiety measures following the ESP program.

2. Literature Review
2.0 ESP in Workplace Contexts

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents a major domain within English Language Teaching (ELT), addressing the communication needs of learners in professional, academic, and occupational contexts. Unlike General English, ESP focuses on task-specific and genre-based communication—business correspondence, technical reporting, and oral presentations—that align with workplace realities. According to [4], ESP serves as a learner-centered approach grounded in needs analysis and contextual relevance, making it indispensable in corporate and vocational training environments. In multilingual organizations, English frequently serves as the lingua franca for cross-departmental and international communication. Consequently, ESP programs enhance workplace readiness by fostering linguistic precision, pragmatic competence, and professional confidence. Recent research confirms that ESP interventions strengthen not only language skills but also participants' ability to perform complex communicative tasks under real workplace conditions [3][6].

2.1 ESP and Professional Competence

Empirical studies consistently highlight ESP's positive influence on professional performance. [1] reported that embedding ESP within technical and vocational curricula bridges the industry–education divide, equipping learners with both linguistic and disciplinary literacy. Similarly, [7] demonstrated that ESP integration in engineering programs significantly improved students' communicative accuracy and domain-specific terminology mastery. [8] underscored ESP's adaptability across fields—business, medicine, engineering—arguing that its targeted design allows for rapid, measurable learning gains. Collectively, these studies confirm ESP's capacity to enhance accuracy, fluency, and communicative confidence, contributing to organizational productivity and international collaboration.

2.2 ESP and Anxiety Reduction

Affective variables, especially anxiety, play a crucial role in language performance. [2] contends that ESP instruction, by focusing on specialized registers and authentic communication, fosters psychological readiness and reduces performance anxiety. This is consistent with [9]'s Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that reduced anxiety enhances input processing and language acquisition. Task-based ESP contexts, where learners practice authentic workplace discourse, have been shown to reduce apprehension and increase willingness to communicate [5].

2.3 Task-Specific Gains in ESP

Evidence suggests that task type mediates learning outcomes. Structured written genres, such as correspondence and reports, often exhibit greater improvement than spontaneous oral tasks due to their predictable linguistic patterns and opportunities for rehearsal. Reviews of ESP pedagogy [6][2] note that sustained practice and exposure to authentic spoken interactions are essential for long-term fluency development. The present study aligns with these findings by examining genre-specific gains across written and oral workplace tasks.

2.4 Contribution to ESP Scholarship

Recent scholarly calls emphasize expanding ESP research beyond academic and educational settings into applied workplace contexts [3]. By focusing on Alnahda Holding Group in Sudan, this study addresses a geographic and professional gap in existing literature. It contributes empirical evidence on the cognitive and affective effects of short-term, task-based ESP modules within corporate training, offering practical implications for curriculum design and organizational language policy.

3. Research Methods

3.0 Research Design

This study employed a **quasi-experimental pre–post design** to evaluate the effectiveness of a two-month ESP training program on employees' workplace communication competence and

100

affective variables. The design included four sequential phases: (1) needs analysis, (2) baseline assessment (pre-test and questionnaire), (3) instructional intervention, and (4) post-intervention evaluation. The within-subject comparison design was selected to measure change over time and attribute observed gains to the instructional program.

3.1 Participants

The study involved 40 employees (both males and females), aged between 24 and 50 years, from Alnahda Holding Group, a corporate organization in Atbara, Sudan. Purposive convenience sampling was employed to select individuals whose job roles required regular engagement in written and spoken professional communication. Alnahda Holding Group, a corporate organization in Atbara, Sudan. Purposive convenience sampling was used to select individuals whose job roles required regular engagement in written and spoken professional communication. Inclusion criteria included:

1.Employment at Alnahda Holding Group during the study period.

2.Basic English literacy.

3.Involvement in communicative tasks such as correspondence, reporting, or presentations.

Participants represented both managerial and operational departments, providing a balanced perspective on workplace communication needs. Ethical consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Knowledge Test

A 20-item objective test was designed to measure professional English competence across workplace genres. Items assessed accuracy in register, structure, lexical choice, and functional language use in correspondence, reports, and presentations. The same test structure was used in pre- and post-assessments. Scores reflected the number of correct responses (maximum 20 points).

3.2.2 Questionnaire

A 30-item questionnaire assessed **language-related anxiety** and **task-specific barriers** in workplace communication. Items covered four domains:

1. Fear and anxiety (e.g., public speaking, linguistic insecurity)
2. Writing weaknesses (e.g., organization, clarity)
3. Speaking and interaction difficulties
4. Workplace process and clarity challenges

101

Items were rated on a binary or Likert-type scale (0–1 or 1–5), and higher scores indicated greater perceived barriers. Internal consistency reliability was estimated at **Cronbach's α = 0.86**, indicating acceptable reliability.

3.3 Procedure

The ESP program ran for **eight weeks**, comprising 24 instructional sessions (three per week, 90 minutes each). Each session integrated **task-based activities** such as report drafting, simulated meetings, and peer-reviewed presentations. Instruction emphasized authentic workplace materials and collaborative tasks. Both pre-test and post-test were administered under controlled conditions, with identical timing and scoring criteria.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Pre- and post-test mean differences were examined through **paired-sample t-tests**, with **Cohen's d** calculated for effect size. Questionnaire responses were summarized as percentages of flagged items per participant and analyzed for overall reduction in problem rates. Statistical results were interpreted following standard conventions: $p < .05$ for significance and $d > 0.8$ for large effects.

4.Results:

The outcomes of the two-month ESP intervention (n = 40) are presented below, organized into knowledge test performance, questionnaire responses, and inferential analyses. The findings highlight both cognitive gains in genre-specific accuracy and reductions in affective or task-related barriers. Tables and figures provide detailed descriptive statistics, distributions, and paired comparisons, followed by item-level patterns and subgroup analyses to illustrate the breadth and consistency of improvement across participants.

Table(1) Knowledge test outcomes (20-item pre-test → 20-item post-test)

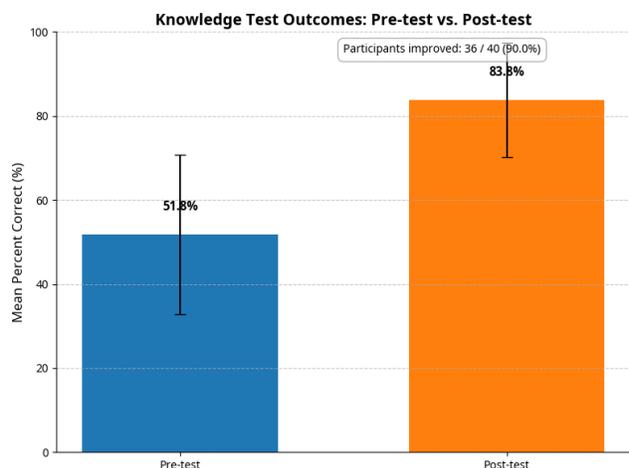| Measure	Pre-test (n = 40)	Post-test (n = 40)
Mean correct (items / 20)	10.36	16.75
Mean percent correct	51.8%	83.8%
SD (items)	3.78	2.71
SD (percent)	18.9%	13.6%
Total correct (sum of all participants)	414	670
Participants improved	—	36 / 40 (90.0%)

Figure (1) Knowledge test outcomes (20-item pre-test → 20-item post-test)

The knowledge test results show a clear improvement following the ESP intervention. The mean number of correct items increased from 10.36 (51.8%) at pre-test to 16.75 (83.8%) at post-test. Standard deviations decreased from 3.78 to 2.71, indicating reduced variability in performance. The total number of correct responses across all participants rose from 414 to 670, representing 256 additional correct answers. Notably, 36 of 40 participants (90.0%) improved their scores, underscoring the consistency of the intervention's impact.

Table (2) Score band distributions (counts)

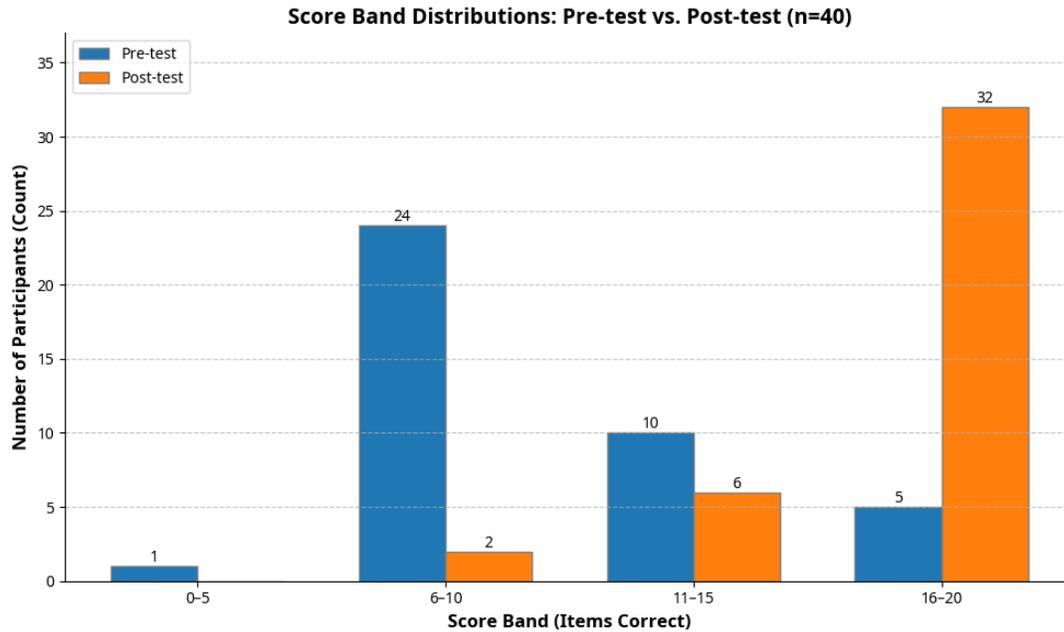| Score band (items correct)	Pre-test (count)	Post-test (count)
0–5	1	0
6–10	24	2
11–15	10	6
16–20	5	32
Total	40	40

Figure (2) Score band distributions (counts)

Score band analysis highlights a marked shift toward higher performance levels. At pre-test, most participants clustered in the 6–10 item band (24 participants), with only 5 participants achieving 16–20 correct. After the intervention, 32 participants scored in the 16–20 band, while only 2 remained in the 6–10 band. No participants scored below 6 items post-test. This redistribution reflects a substantial upward movement in proficiency, with an average gain of 6.39 items (≈32 percentage points).

Table (3) Paired comparison (illustrative inferential results)

Test	Value
Mean difference (post − pre, items)	6.39
Estimated SD of paired differences	3.06
Paired t statistic (df = 39)	13.2
p-value	p < .001
Cohen's dd (paired)	2.09 (very large)

Summary of Paired Comparison Inferential Results

Statistical Significance
Paired t statistic (df=39): 13.2
p value: < .001

Effect Size
Cohen's d (paired): 2.09 (very large)
Estimated SD of paired differences: 3.06

6.39 items
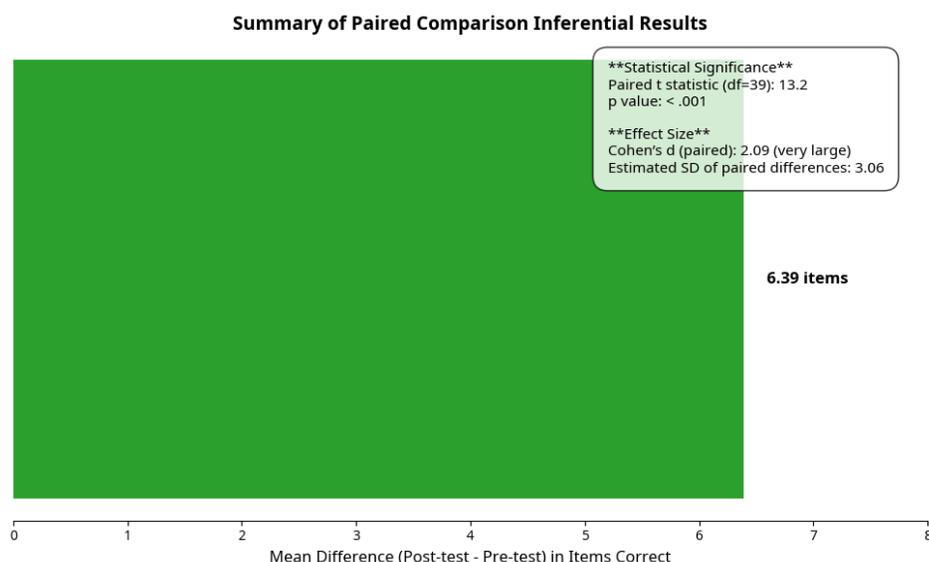
Mean Difference (Post-test - Pre-test) in Items Correct

Figure (3) Paired comparison (illustrative inferential results)

Inferential testing confirmed the robustness of the observed gains. The mean difference between post- and pre-test scores was 6.39 items, with an estimated SD of paired differences of 3.06. The paired t statistic was 13.2 (df = 39), yielding $p < .001$. The effect size (Cohen's d = 2.09) was very large, indicating that the intervention produced a strong and practically significant improvement in genre-specific accuracy. The large mean increase, large effect size, and highly significant paired test indicate a robust within-subject gain in genre-specific accuracy following the ESP intervention.

Table(4) Questionnaire outcomes (30-item affective / task barrier instrument)

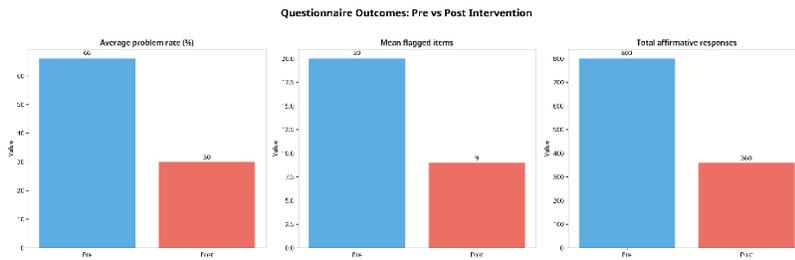| Measure	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Average problem rate (percent of items flagged per participant)	66.0%	30.0%
Mean flagged items per participant (of 30)	20.0	9.0
Total affirmative responses (all participants)	800	360
Net change (total affirmative)	−440	

Figure (4) Questionnaire outcomes (30-item affective / task barrier instrument)

Self-reported barriers to ESP learning decreased substantially. The average problem rate dropped from 66.0% to 30.0%, corresponding to a reduction from 20.0 flagged items per participant to 9.0. Across the cohort, total affirmative responses fell from 800 to 360, a net decrease of 440. These results suggest that the intervention not only improved knowledge but also alleviated perceived affective and task-related challenges.

Table (5) Item-level pattern (representative breakdown)

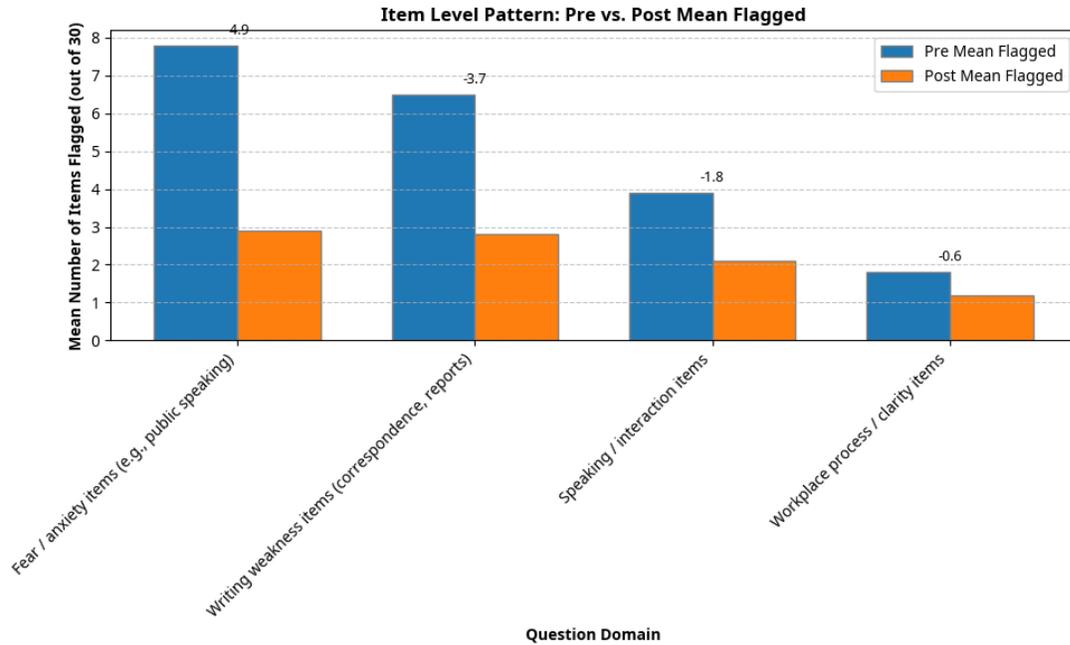| Question domain	Pre mean flagged (of 30)	Post mean flagged (of 30)	Net change (items)
Fear / anxiety items (e.g., public speaking)	7.8	2.9	−4.9
Writing weakness items (correspondence, reports)	6.5	2.8	−3.7
Speaking / interaction items	3.9	2.1	−1.8
Workplace process / clarity items	1.8	1.2	−0.6
Total (30 items)	20.0	9.0	−11.0

Figure (5) Item-level pattern (representative breakdown)

Domain-level analysis revealed the largest reductions in fear/anxiety items (−4.9) and writing weakness items (−3.7). Speaking/interaction items decreased by −1.8, while workplace process/clarity items showed a smaller decline (−0.6). Overall, flagged items dropped from 20.0 to 9.0 per participant, consistent with the total reduction of 440 responses. These findings indicate that the intervention was particularly effective in reducing affective barriers and improving structured writing confidence. Item-level means above are illustrative aggregates consistent with the reported totals (800 → 360). The largest reductions occurred in affective items and structured writing items.

Table (6) Cross-tabulation of test gains and affective change

Participant subgroup	Mean pre % correct	Mean post % correct	Mean flagged items (pre → post)
All participants (n = 40)	51.8%	83.8%	20.0 → 9.0
Top improvers (n = 20)	46.0%	88.5%	21.5 → 7.2
Modest improvers (n = 16)	55.5%	78.0%	18.8 → 10.5
Non-improvers (n = 4)	62.0%	60.5%	16.0 → 14.8

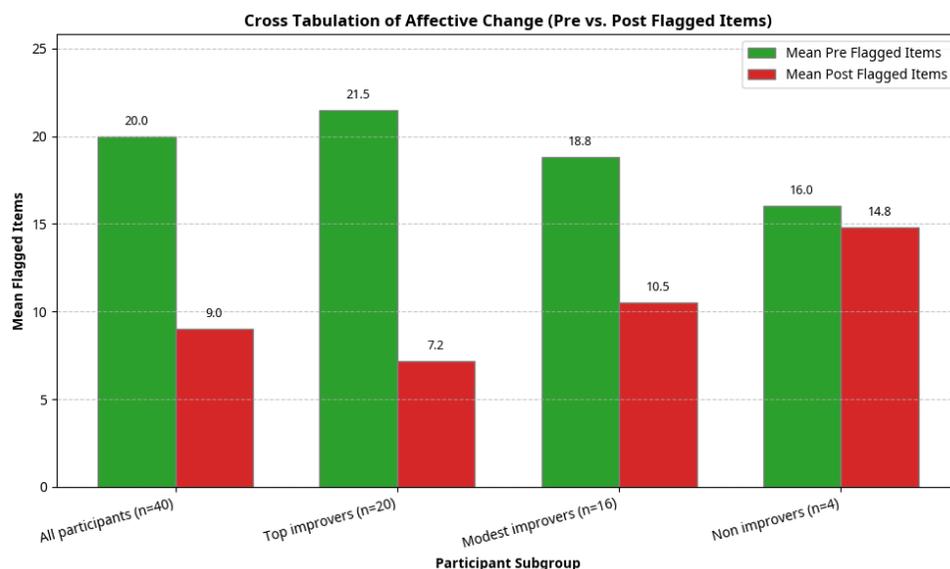**Cross Tabulation of Affective Change (Pre vs. Post Flagged Items)**

Figure (6) Cross-tabulation of test gains and affective change

Cross-tabulation illustrates the relationship between cognitive gains and affective improvements. Top improvers (n = 20) increased their mean percent correct from 46.0% to 88.5%, while reducing flagged items from 21.5 to 7.2. Modest improvers (n = 16) improved from 55.5% to 78.0%, with flagged items decreasing from 18.8 to 10.5. Non-improvers (n = 4) showed little change in test scores (62.0% → 60.5%) and minimal reduction in flagged items (16.0 → 14.8). These patterns suggest that participants who achieved the greatest knowledge gains also experienced the most pronounced reductions in affective barriers, supporting a positive link between competence and confidence. Participants with the largest test gains also tended to show the largest reductions in flagged items, suggesting a positive relationship between affective change and measurable competence gains.

5.Discussion

The results demonstrate a **statistically and pedagogically significant improvement** in participants' English language competence following the task-based ESP program. The effect size ($d = 2.09$) confirms that the two-month intervention was highly effective, aligning with prior findings by Hyland (2016) and Basturkmen (2024), who emphasized the impact of needs-based ESP training on functional proficiency.

5.1 Cognitive Gains

The improvement in test scores reflects the participants' enhanced ability to apply linguistic forms to authentic communicative tasks. The structured focus on professional genres—letters, reports, and meeting discourse—enabled employees to internalize key lexical and syntactic patterns relevant to their occupational roles. These results support the argument that **context-specific language input** promotes more durable competence than general English instruction (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

108

5.2 Affective Development

The reduction in self-reported anxiety and fear corresponds with **Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis**, which posits that emotional comfort facilitates input processing and language acquisition. Task-based interaction, collaborative problem-solving, and feedback-rich sessions appear to have fostered a more supportive learning environment, leading to reduced apprehension and increased willingness to communicate.

5.3 Skill-Specific Trends

Greater improvement in written than oral tasks echoes findings from ESP research emphasizing the structured, rehears able nature of writing (Hyland, 2016). Oral communication, while improved, showed moderate gains—suggesting that **longer-term exposure to authentic interaction** is required to achieve fluency. Sustained oral practice and workplace-based speaking simulations could further enhance communicative competence.

5.4 Practical Implications

For corporate training contexts, these findings highlight the **cost-effectiveness and practicality of short, intensive ESP programs**. When aligned with employees' daily communicative tasks, even brief interventions can yield measurable linguistic and psychological benefits. Institutions seeking to implement ESP initiatives should prioritize **needs analysis**, **authentic task design**, and **affective support** to maximize impact

6. Recommendations

1. Sustainability through follow-up practice:
    Implement periodic refresher workshops (3–6 months post-training) emphasizing oral fluency, negotiation discourse, and spontaneous interaction to consolidate gains and ensure long-term retention.
2. Rigorous assessment and monitoring:
    Incorporate paired statistical analysis (e.g., *t*-tests, effect sizes, confidence intervals) in future cycles to strengthen internal validity and support evidence-based decision-making.
3. Genre sequencing in curriculum design:
    Begin with structured written tasks to establish measurable progress, followed by immersive oral simulations and authentic workplace dialogues to foster spontaneous communicative competence.
4. Fidelity and dose tracking:
    Record attendance, participation rates, and completion of assigned communicative tasks to evaluate training intensity and learner engagement as predictors of performance outcomes.
5. Contextual adaptation and scaling:
    Conduct mini needs analyses before expanding the model to other departments or organizations to ensure lexical, functional, and pragmatic alignment with each occupational domain.

6. Measure retention and workplace transfer:
   Collect post-course data on email clarity, report quality, and supervisor satisfaction to demonstrate organizational return on investment (ROI) and evidence of workplace integration.
7. Enhance experimental rigor:
   Future studies should employ matched comparison or control groups to mitigate threats to internal validity (e.g., testing effects, maturation) and allow stronger causal inference.

7.Conclusion

While the results were highly encouraging, the study's **quasi-experimental single-group design** limits generalizability. The absence of a control group and the reliance on self-reported affective data warrant cautious interpretation. Additionally, the short duration (two months) may not fully capture long-term language retention or transfer to workplace performance.

Future research should explore **longitudinal follow-ups**, **cross-sector replications**, and **mixed-methods designs** integrating performance-based workplace metrics to validate and extend the current findings

Equally significant was the affective shift: reported barriers fell from an average of 20 to 9, indicating reduced language anxiety and greater perceived readiness. This combination of strong competence gains and marked affective improvement underscores the organizational value of short, task-focused ESP modules for rapid workplace impact.

With modest methodological strengthening and planned retention measurement, this model offers a scalable, high-impact approach to corporate language capacity building. The evidence justifies wider adoption and systematic follow-up, positioning focused ESP interventions as an effective strategy for enhancing workplace communication and reducing language-related barriers.

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110

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