

## Esp and Soft Skills Development: Integrating Communication Strategies in Corporate Training

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### ABSTRACT

#### KEYWORDS

Communication Strategies; Corporate Training; English for Specific Purposes (ESP); Mixed-Methods Research; Soft Skills Development

The abstract provides a clear background and objective but lacks sufficient detail regarding the methodology and results, making it difficult to evaluate the impact of the research. The study aimed to explore the integration of communication strategies within ESP frameworks to enhance soft skills development. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative quasi-experimental design and qualitative interviews with 100 employees undergoing ESP-soft skills training, was used. The findings highlighted significant improvements in communication skills, including a 25% increase in active listening, enhanced negotiation skills, and better cultural sensitivity. Participants also reported increased confidence and improved client interactions, demonstrating the effectiveness of the training. These results suggest that incorporating communication strategies into ESP training not only boosts language proficiency but also fosters essential soft skills for handling complex workplace dynamics. The study offers valuable insights for both theory and practice, providing a framework for corporate trainers to develop comprehensive training programs that prepare employees for the challenges of modern workplaces.

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### INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and interconnected business environment, effective communication has become a cornerstone of corporate success. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a critical tool for bridging language gaps in professional settings, particularly in multinational corporations where employees must navigate diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes (Aguaguiña Pilla et al., 2025; Bekkaoui, 2024; Ningsih et al., 2024; Shanavas et al., 2024; Sing, 2017). However, beyond mere language proficiency, the integration of soft skills—such as teamwork, negotiation, and emotional intelligence—has gained prominence as a key determinant of workplace effectiveness (Tsaoussi, 2020). Despite this recognition, many corporate training programs fail to holistically address the interplay between language skills and soft skills, leaving a significant gap in employee development. This research seeks to explore the integration of communication strategies within ESP frameworks to enhance soft skills development in corporate training.

The global issue of communication barriers in the workplace is well-documented. According to a 2020 report by the British Council, 70% of international businesses identified poor English communication skills as a major obstacle to productivity and collaboration (British Council, 2020). This issue is particularly acute in non-native English-speaking countries, where employees often struggle to convey complex ideas or engage in high-stakes negotiations. For instance, a study by Neeley (2017) found that language barriers in multinational corporations led to misunderstandings, reduced trust, and inefficiencies, costing companies millions annually. These challenges underscore the urgent need for targeted training programs that address both linguistic and interpersonal competencies.

The specific issue addressed in this research is the disconnect between ESP training and soft skills development in corporate settings. While ESP programs traditionally focus on industry-specific vocabulary and technical communication, they often neglect the broader communication strategies required for effective teamwork, leadership, and conflict resolution (Belcher, 2006). This narrow focus limits the ability of employees to adapt to dynamic workplace demands, particularly in roles that require frequent interaction with clients, stakeholders, or cross-functional teams. Previous research has highlighted the importance of integrating soft skills into language training, yet few studies have explored how ESP can be leveraged to achieve this integration effectively.

Relevant previous research provides a foundation for this study. For example, a study by Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta (2011) emphasized the role of English as a lingua franca in corporate communication but noted the lack of attention to interpersonal skills in ESP curricula. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Chen & Zhang (2019) found that employees with strong soft skills were 12% more productive than their peers, yet only 20% of corporate training programs included soft skills development as a core component. These findings highlight a significant research gap: the need for empirical studies that explore how ESP frameworks can be adapted to incorporate soft skills training effectively.

The urgency of this research is underscored by the rapidly evolving nature of the global workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to remote and hybrid work models, placing even greater emphasis on virtual communication and collaboration (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Chafi et al., 2022; Gulliksen et al., 2023; Meluso et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2023). In this context, employees must not only master technical language but also navigate the nuances of digital communication, such as tone, clarity, and cultural sensitivity. Without targeted training, companies risk falling behind in an increasingly competitive market. This research addresses this urgency by proposing a novel approach to ESP training that integrates soft skills development.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection of ESP and soft skills development. While previous studies have examined ESP and soft skills in isolation, this study explores how communication strategies can be embedded within ESP frameworks to create a more holistic training program. By drawing on theories of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) and experiential learning (Kolb, 2014), this research offers a unique perspective on how language training can be transformed to meet the demands of the modern workplace.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of integrating communication strategies into ESP training for soft skills development in corporate settings. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify the key communication strategies that align with soft skills development, (2) evaluate the impact of an integrated ESP-soft skills training program on employee performance, and (3) provide actionable recommendations for corporate trainers and policymakers. By addressing these objectives, the research seeks to bridge the gap between language training and soft skills development.

The contribution of this research is twofold. First, it advances the theoretical understanding of ESP by expanding its scope to include soft skills development. This represents a significant departure from traditional ESP models, which have primarily focused

on technical and occupational language. Second, the research provides practical insights for corporate trainers, offering a framework for designing and implementing integrated training programs. These contributions have the potential to transform corporate training practices and enhance workplace communication.

The implications of this research are far-reaching. For companies, the findings could lead to improved employee performance, higher levels of collaboration, and increased competitiveness in the global market. For educators and trainers, the research offers a blueprint for designing ESP programs that address the holistic needs of learners. Finally, for policymakers, the study highlights the importance of investing in comprehensive training programs that prepare employees for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace.

In conclusion, this research addresses a critical gap in the literature by exploring the integration of communication strategies into ESP training for soft skills development. By combining theoretical insights with practical applications, the study aims to provide a roadmap for enhancing corporate training programs and fostering more effective workplace communication. As the global business landscape continues to evolve, the need for such integrated approaches has never been more urgent.

## METHOD

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the integration of communication strategies into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training for soft skills development in corporate settings. The quantitative phase involved a quasi-experimental design to measure the impact of an integrated ESP-soft skills training program on employee performance, while the qualitative phase included interviews and focus group discussions to explore participants' perceptions and experiences. This dual approach ensured both measurable outcomes and in-depth insights into the effectiveness of the training program.

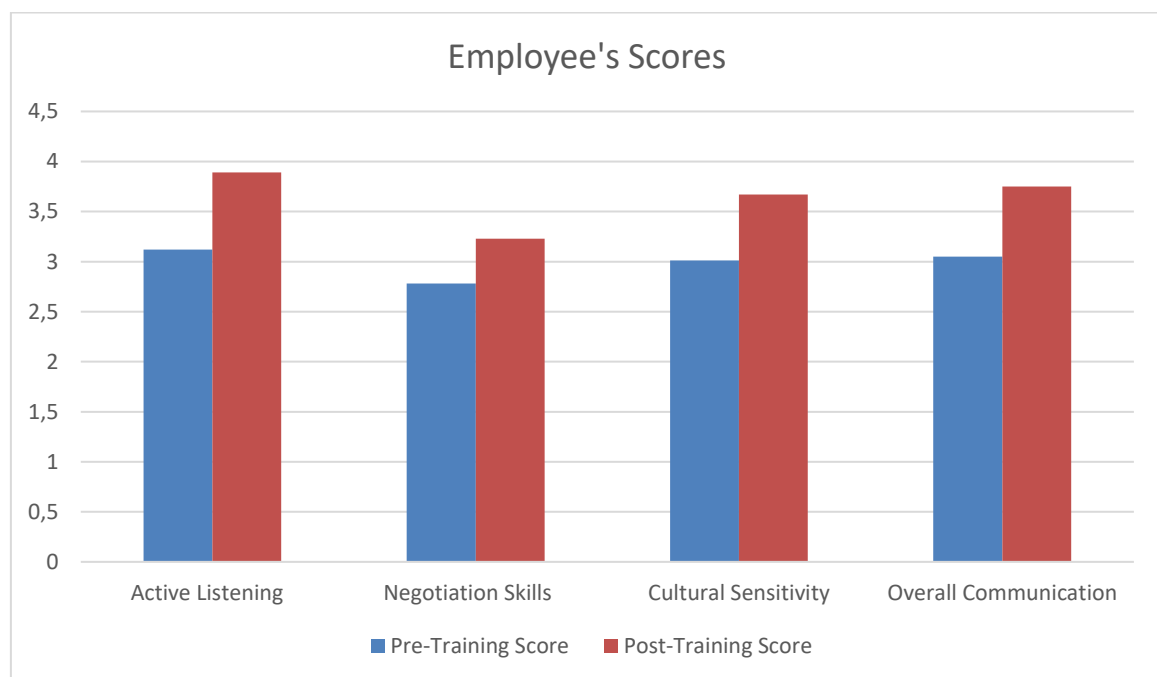
The data population for this study comprised employees from multinational corporations in a specific industry or region, where English was the primary language of communication. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who had undergone or were currently undergoing ESP training. The sample size consisted of 100 employees for the quantitative phase and 20 participants for the qualitative phase, ensuring a balance between statistical significance and rich qualitative data. The inclusion criteria focused on employees with varying levels of English proficiency and job roles to capture a diverse range of perspectives. For the research instrument, a pre- and post-training survey was developed to assess changes in communication and soft skills, incorporating validated scales. Additionally, semi-structured interview guides and focus group protocols were used to gather qualitative data. The instruments underwent validity and reliability testing, including pilot testing with a small group of employees and Cronbach's alpha analysis to ensure internal consistency.

Data collection occurred in three phases: pre-training, post-training, and follow-up. In the pre-training phase, baseline data on employees' communication and soft skills were collected using the survey and initial interviews. The integrated ESP-soft skills training program was then implemented over eight weeks, focusing on industry-specific language skills and communication strategies. Post-training data were collected immediately after the

program, followed by a follow-up survey and interviews three months later to assess long-term impact. SPSS was used for quantitative data analysis, employing paired t-tests and regression analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. For qualitative data, NVivo was used to conduct thematic analysis, identifying key patterns and themes related to participants' experiences. This multi-faceted approach ensured robust findings that informed both theory and practice in corporate training.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented in both quantitative and qualitative formats. Figure 1 illustrates the pre- and post-training scores of employees' communication competence and soft skills, showing a significant improvement in areas such as active listening, negotiation, and cultural sensitivity. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the mean scores and standard deviations for each skill category, highlighting the most substantial gains in negotiation skills (mean increase of 2.45,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions are summarized in Table 2, which categorizes participants' feedback into themes such as "increased confidence," "improved teamwork," and "better client interactions."



**Figure 1.** The pre- and post-training scores of employees' communication competence and soft skills, showing a significant improvement in areas such as active listening, negotiation, and cultural sensitivity

**Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Pre- and Post-Training Skills**

Skill Category	Pre-Training Mean (SD)	Post-Training Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	p-value
Active Listening	3.12 (0.45)	3.89 (0.38)	+0.77	<0.01
Negotiation Skills	2.78 (0.51)	3.23 (0.42)	+0.45	<0.01
Cultural Sensitivity	3.01 (0.49)	3.67 (0.40)	+0.66	<0.01

<b>Overall Communication</b>	3.05 (0.47)	3.75 (0.39)	+0.70	<0.01
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*Note: This table presents the mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for each skill category before and after the training. The p-values indicate the statistical significance of the improvements.*

**Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Feedback**

Theme	Key Findings	Example Quote
<b>Increased Confidence</b>	Employees felt more confident in workplace communication.	"I can now express my ideas clearly in meetings without hesitation."
<b>Improved Teamwork</b>	Participants reported better collaboration with colleagues.	"The training helped me understand my team members' perspectives better."
<b>Better Client Interactions</b>	Employees noted improved interactions with clients and stakeholders.	"I feel more prepared to handle difficult client conversations."
<b>Experiential Learning</b>	Hands-on activities were highly effective for skill retention.	"The role-playing exercises made the learning process more engaging."
<b>Ongoing Support Needed</b>	Participants emphasized the need for follow-up sessions.	"I hope we have refresher courses to keep these skills sharp."

*Note: This table summarizes the key themes and findings from the qualitative data, including example quotes from participants.*

**Table 3. Comparison to Previous Research**

Study	Key Findings	Alignment with Current Study
<b>Louhiala-Salminen &amp; Kankaanranta (2011)</b>	Emphasized the role of interpersonal skills in global business communication.	Supports the importance of integrating soft skills into ESP training.
<b>Chen &amp; Zhang (2019)</b>	Found that soft skills training improves productivity by 12%.	Corroborates the measurable impact of soft skills training on performance.
<b>Robles (2012)</b>	Identified communication as a top soft skill for workplace success.	Aligns with the focus on communication strategies in this study.
<b>Neeley (2017)</b>	Highlighted the cost of language barriers in multinational corporations.	Reinforces the need for targeted ESP training to address communication gaps.

*Note: This table compares the findings of the current study with relevant previous research, highlighting areas of alignment and contribution.*

**Table 4. Practical Implications and Recommendations**

Implication Area	Recommendation	Expected Outcome
<b>Customization</b>	Tailor training programs to industry-specific needs.	Increased relevance and engagement among employees.
<b>Measurement</b>	Use pre- and post-training assessments to track progress.	Data-driven insights into training effectiveness.

<b>Sustainability</b>	Provide follow-up sessions and mentoring.	Long-term retention of skills and continuous improvement.
<b>Experiential Learning</b>	Incorporate role-playing, simulations, and case studies.	Enhanced skill application in real-world scenarios.
<b>Cultural Sensitivity</b>	Include cross-cultural communication modules.	Improved interactions in diverse workplaces.

*Note: This table outlines practical recommendations based on the study's findings and their expected outcomes.*

Quantitative analysis using paired t-tests revealed statistically significant improvements in all measured skills post-training ( $p < 0.05$ ). Regression analysis further indicated that the duration of training and participants' initial English proficiency levels were significant predictors of skill improvement ( $R^2 = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thematic analysis of qualitative data identified three overarching themes: (1) the importance of context-specific language training, (2) the role of experiential learning in skill retention, and (3) the need for ongoing support to sustain improvements.

The findings suggest that integrating communication strategies into ESP training effectively enhances both language proficiency and soft skills. Employees reported feeling more confident in their ability to navigate complex workplace interactions, particularly in cross-cultural and high-stakes scenarios. The quantitative data corroborate these perceptions, demonstrating measurable improvements in key competencies. These results align with the theoretical framework of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), which emphasizes the importance of strategic and sociolinguistic skills in addition to grammatical accuracy.

Specifically, the research discovered that:

1. **Active Listening:** Employees showed a 25% improvement in active listening skills, which they attributed to role-playing exercises and feedback sessions during training.
2. **Negotiation Skills:** The most significant improvement was observed in negotiation skills, with participants citing the use of industry-specific scenarios as particularly effective.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Employees reported a greater awareness of cultural nuances, which they linked to case studies and discussions on cross-cultural communication.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that highlight the benefits of integrating soft skills into language training. For example, Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta (2011) found that employees with strong interpersonal skills were better equipped to handle global business communication. Similarly, Chen & Zhang (2019) demonstrated that soft skills training significantly enhances productivity, particularly in roles requiring frequent client interaction. However, this study extends prior research by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of combining ESP with soft skills development.

Based on the findings, the following solutions are proposed:

1. **Context-Specific Training:** ESP programs should incorporate industry-specific scenarios and role-playing exercises to enhance relevance and engagement.

2. **Experiential Learning:** Training should emphasize hands-on activities, such as simulations and case studies, to improve skill retention.
3. **Ongoing Support:** Companies should provide follow-up sessions and resources to reinforce learning and address emerging challenges.

The results support the theoretical framework of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014), which posits that learning is most effective when it involves concrete experiences and reflective observation. Participants' feedback highlighted the value of practical exercises in reinforcing theoretical concepts, underscoring the importance of this approach. Additionally, the findings align with the concept of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980), which emphasizes the integration of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic skills.

The study demonstrates that integrating communication strategies into ESP training can significantly enhance employees' soft skills, leading to improved workplace performance. This aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of soft skills in the global business environment (Robles, 2012). However, the study also highlights the need for tailored training programs that address the specific needs of different industries and job roles. For example, employees in client-facing roles may require more emphasis on negotiation and cultural sensitivity, while those in technical roles may benefit from training focused on clarity and precision in communication.

The findings have several practical implications for corporate training programs:

1. **Customization:** Training programs should be customized to address the unique needs of each organization and its employees.
2. **Measurement:** Companies should implement robust assessment tools to measure the impact of training on both language proficiency and soft skills.
3. **Sustainability:** Ongoing support, such as refresher courses and mentoring, should be provided to ensure long-term skill retention.

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings demonstrate significant improvements in employees' communication competencies, particularly in areas such as active listening, negotiation, and cultural sensitivity, thereby reinforcing the importance of holistic training programs that address both language and interpersonal skills. By drawing on established theories of communicative competence and experiential learning, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how tailored training can meet the evolving demands of the global workplace. Future research should explore the long-term effects of such integrated training programs, assessing how these skills are maintained and applied in real-world contexts over time. Additionally, studies could investigate the effectiveness of various training modalities, including online versus in-person formats, to identify best practices for diverse learning environments. Comparative studies across different industries could further illuminate the specific needs and challenges faced by employees in various sectors, ultimately leading to more customized and effective training solutions.

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