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Integrating English Language Instruction Into Vocational Artisan Training: A Framework for Enhanced Professional Competence and Economic Empowerment in Nigeria

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Keywords

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to find how the integration of English language instruction into Nigerian vocational Artisan's training can enhance communicative competence, professional performance, and economic inclusion among Nigerian trades people. The study is guided by the theory of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)and workplace literacy, the study adopted mixed-methods research design sampling63artisans across five trades in Nigeria (carpentry, tailoring, welding, automotive repair, and electrical installation) supported by semi-structured interviews. The study findings shows writing tasks such as preparing invoices or quotations posed significant challenges, suggesting that literacy gaps extend beyond oral communication to written professional documentation. It also reveals that problems related to communication occur frequently in artisans' workplaces, with the highest incidence recorded for misunderstanding client requests (m = 3.31) and inability to interpret safety instructions (M = 3.25). Participants identified the needs for task-based English training in reading technical manuals, writing job quotation, using digital marketing platforms and understanding safety regulations. This study suggests a framework designed to integrate language instruction with workplace demands. A Trade-Specific English Curriculum (TSEC). The study concludes that language integration within vocational programs is undeniably pedagogical and economically imperative.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, Vocational Education has a key role in the development of skilled human resources. Skilled Human resources reduces unemployment and supports industrialization, it also promotes economic sustainability. However, despite competence of Nigerian artisans technically, participation in formal economic structures and access to global opportunities remains limited for them. One critical reason for this limitation is the lack of adequate proficiency in English Language, and this challenges artisans' ability to communicate effectively in professional settings, engage with clients, interpret technical manuals, and adopt emerging technologies (Oladipo & Lawal, 2020). English Language in Nigeria serves as the language of official communication and education (Ibrahim & Okonkwo, 2022). Also in vocational settings, artisans are expected to interact with clients, suppliers, and regulatory institutions, proficiency in English language in these settings is imperative. (Eze &

Musa 2024) states that training programs which are organized for Artisans in Nigeria throws all emphasis on technical skills and neglect language and communication ability (Eze & Musa, 2024). Studies also show that artisans in informal training contexts are illiterate or semi-literate and it negatively affects their ability to adopt new technologies (Lebechukwu & Akpen-Ade, 2021)

This study therefore examines how the integration of English language instruction into artisan training can help accelerate professional competence, workplace communication, and economic growth. By proposing a pedagogical framework grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles, the study seeks to position language education as a strategic instrument for skill development and socio-economic advancement in Nigeria's vocational landscape. However, despite competence of Nigerian artisans technically, participation in formal economic structures and access to global opportunities remains limited for them. One critical reason for this limitation is the lack of adequate proficiency in English Language, and this challenges artisans' ability to communicate effectively in professional settings, engage with clients, interpret technical manuals, and adopt emerging technologies (Oladipo & Lawal, 2020). English Language in Nigeria serves as the language of official communication and education (Ibrahim & Okonkwo, 2022). In vocational settings, where artisans are expected to interact with clients, suppliers, and regulatory institutions, proficiency in English language is imperative. Eze & Musa (2024) observe that training programs organized for artisans in Nigeria place disproportionate emphasis on technical skills while neglecting language and communication ability development. Studies also show that artisans in informal training contexts often possess limited literacy or semi-literacy, which negatively affects their ability to adopt new technologies and engage with formal business systems. Furthermore, Nigeria's socio-economic context compounds these challenges: widespread poverty, inadequate educational infrastructure, and the dominance of informal apprenticeship systems perpetuate a cycle where artisans acquire technical skills through oral transmission in indigenous languages or Pidgin English, without structured exposure to Standard English literacy. This linguistic marginalization limits artisans' capacity to meet certification standards, access credit facilities, comply with regulatory frameworks, or participate in government-funded skill development initiatives that require documented competencies (Lebechukwu & Akpen-Ade, 2021; Ebekozien et al., 2024). Consequently, despite possessing practical expertise, Nigerian artisans remain economically underutilized and socially excluded from pathways to upward mobility.

This study addresses this critical gap by examining how the integration of English language instruction into artisan training can enhance professional competence, workplace communication, and economic growth. By proposing a pedagogical framework grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles, the study seeks to position language education as a strategic instrument for skill development and socio-economic advancement in Nigeria's vocational landscape. The novelty of this research lies in its development of a Trade-Specific English Curriculum (TSEC) that systematically integrates ESP pedagogy with task-based learning and collaborative instructional models specifically tailored to the Nigerian artisan context. Unlike generic language programs, the TSEC framework operationalizes language instruction within authentic trade practices through empirically derived needs analysis, trade-differentiated modules, and performance-based assessment aligned with workplace realities. This methodological innovation, combining quantitative proficiency measurement with qualitative workplace discourse analysis, enables the identification of trade-specific communicative demands and the design of contextually responsive pedagogical interventions. Furthermore, the study extends ESP theory beyond conventional academic and corporate contexts into Nigeria's informal vocational sector, thereby contributing original theoretical

insights into language-for-work education in resource-constrained, multilingual developing economies.

This study aims to explore the communication abilities of Nigerian artisans across various trades, including carpentry, tailoring, welding, electrical installation, and automotive repair, particularly within workplace and client-interaction settings. It seeks to identify the language-related challenges artisans face while performing their daily vocational tasks and engaging in both formal and digital marketplaces. By examining their trade-specific communication needs, the research endeavors to understand how English language proficiency affects artisans' performance, professionalism, and participation in entrepreneurial or online business contexts. Furthermore, the study aims to analyze the relationship between artisans' language competence and workplace efficiency, emphasizing the growing importance of communication skills in contemporary vocational environments. Based on the findings, it seeks to design and propose a Trade-Specific English Curriculum (TSEC) grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and task-based learning principles. The proposed curriculum will provide a pedagogical framework that integrates English instruction into vocational training programs, with the ultimate goal of enhancing artisans' communicative competence, employability, and economic empowerment in an increasingly globalized and digital economy.

METHOD

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design combining structured surveys and semi-structured interviews. This structure provided real time insights into artisans' workplace language experiences. The study was conducted in Kogi State. Artisans in five major trades were sampled. This includes carpenters, tailors, welders, motor mechanics, and electrical installators. A stratified random sampling was used to identify 63 artisans of 12 for carpentry, 15 for tailoring, 11 welding, 12motor mechanics, and 13for electrical installation. Participants were selected from three Local Government Areas (Lokoja, Anyigba, and Okene) to represent urban, semi-urban, and peri-urban contexts. Data were collected over four months (March–June 2024) using two primary instruments. The survey questionnaire comprised four sections covering demographic information, self-rated English proficiency across five skill areas (reading technical documents, writing estimates, listening to instructions, speaking/negotiating with clients, and digital communication) using a 4-point Likert scale, frequency of communication-related problems, and perceived language training needs. Surveys were administered in person by bilingual research assistants fluent in English and local languages (Igala or Ebira) to accommodate artisans with limited literacy. Semi-structured interviews with vocational instructors explored their observations of artisans' English language use, specific communication challenges, current language integration practices, and recommendations for curriculum improvement.

Quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. This was computed to summarize proficiency levels and communication challenges across trades and one-way ANOVA were performed to examine associations between demographic variables and proficiency levels. Qualitative data from interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, employing both deductive coding guided by the ESP theoretical framework and inductive coding to allow emergent themes.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 63 artisans participated in the survey across five trades, 63 artisans of 12 for carpentry, 15 for tailoring, 11 welding, 12 motor mechanics, and 13 for electrical installation. The sample included 45 males (71%) and 18 females (29%), with an average age of 32 years. Over half (58%) had completed at least Junior Secondary School, while 42% had no formal post-primary education. To determine the extent of artisans' English language challenges, responses were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distribution). Table 1 summarizes artisans' self-reported proficiency levels across the four core language skills.

Table 1. Artisans' Self-Rated English Proficiency by Skill Area (N = 450)

Skill Area	High Proficiency (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)	Very Low (%)	Mean (1–4 Scale)
Reading Technical Documents	12.4	18.2	43.1	26.3	2.17
Writing Estimates & Invoices	10.0	20.7	45.3	24.0	2.17
Listening to Instructions	15.6	27.1	38.7	18.6	2.40
Speaking/Negotiating with Clients	14.9	26.4	41.8	16.9	2.40
Digital Communication	8.7	17.8	44.2	29.3	2.06

The table above reveals the generally low proficiency across all four language skills, with reading and writing presenting the greatest challenge. Only about 12% of respondents demonstrated high proficiency in reading technical manuals, while over 69% rated themselves as low or very low. Writing tasks such as preparing invoices or quotations also posed significant challenges, suggesting that literacy gaps extend beyond oral communication to written professional documentation.

Table 2. Frequency of Communication-Related Problems in Daily Work (N = 450)

Type of Communication Problem	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)	Mean (1–4 Scale)
Misunderstanding Client Requests	49.8	35.6	10.2	4.4	3.31
Inability to Read Safety Instructions	44.7	38.9	12.7	3.7	3.25
Errors in Written Estimates	41.3	39.8	13.3	5.6	3.17
Difficulty Using English in Online Platforms	53.6	31.8	10.7	3.9	3.35

Problems related to communication occur frequently in artisans' workplaces, with the highest incidence recorded for misunderstanding client requests (M = 3.31) and inability to interpret safety instructions (M = 3.25). These results substantiate the qualitative findings that artisans depend heavily on colleagues or supervisors for assistance with English-language materials.

The results above shows a consistent pattern of low English proficiency and frequent communication-related challenges among artisans. For more knowledge into the contextual causes and implications of these challenges, qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and interviews were analyzed. The emergent themes are presented in the following sections.

Artisans' English Language Challenges

Survey data revealed that over 70% of artisans reported difficulty reading technical manuals or understanding safety instructions in English. Many rely on colleagues to interpret these documents. Artisans also report problems with speaking and listening in formal client negotiations. These

findings align with Lebechukwu & Akpen-Ade (2021), who found illiteracy hindering usability of catalogues and manuals among craftsmen in Nsukka, Enugu State.

Perceived Language Needs

Participants found several English language skills needed in the workplace. Reading, for technical specifications and safety standards, Speaking & listening to negotiate with clients and coordinate tasks to be performed. Writing for estimates, invoices, digital communication in online space. Digital literacy is the ability to use English on online platforms (Ojochegbe & Chubiy-ojo 2024), search technical resources especially in this digital age. These needs correspond with findings in apprenticeship/skill gap studies (Ebekozien et al., 2024; "Ugwuneke, Onyeneke, & Pat-Mbano 2024). While the communication challenges appear general, further analysis of the survey and interview data revealed variation across trades, highlighting the contextual nature of artisans' linguistic needs. Carpenters and welders, for instance, frequently encounter difficulty interpreting technical specifications, measuring units, and safety codes expressed in complex English syntax. Tailors and auto mechanics, on the other hand, struggle primarily with oral interaction and customer negotiation, particularly when clients employ Standard English or digitally mediated communication through text and social media.

These differences indicate that artisans' language challenges are not homogeneous but are shaped by the communicative demands of each trade. The persistence of these deficiencies is largely attributable to the structure of Nigeria's apprenticeship system, where learning is transmitted orally in indigenous languages or Pidgin English without formal literacy reinforcement. Most artisans complete years of technical practice without exposure to structured reading, writing, or professional communication in English. Consequently, while their technical dexterity improves, their linguistic competence stagnates, perpetuating barriers to documentation, safety compliance, and participation in formal or digital markets.

The analysis further established a strong relationship between artisans' English language proficiency and their overall professional competence. Artisans who demonstrated moderate proficiency in English reported higher efficiency in interpreting technical instructions, completing documentation, and adhering to safety procedures. They also expressed greater ease in negotiating with clients and maintaining business relationships, which they associated with enhanced credibility and repeat patronage. Conversely, low-proficiency artisans frequently misinterpreted equipment labels, leading to costly mistakes, workplace accidents, and reputational loss. English proficiency also emerged as a determinant of entrepreneurial growth. Those who could navigate digital spaces used online marketing platforms and English-language tutorials to attract clients and upgrade their skills, whereas low-proficiency counterparts remained excluded from these opportunities. These findings affirm that English language proficiency functions not only as a communicative resource but as a marker of professionalism and a catalyst for occupational mobility and digital inclusion in the contemporary Nigerian economy.

Proposed Framework: Trade-Specific English Curriculum (TSEC)

Showing support to the findings of this study, we therefore propose a Trade-Specific English Curriculum (TSEC) as a framework for integrating English language instruction into artisan training programs in Nigeria. This framework (TSEC model) has its founding root in the principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) theory, it emphasize the effectiveness of language learning when instruction is directly linked to real-life communicative contexts mingled with occupational practices. This framework responds to the varying deficiencies in communication among artisans, who, despite

their technical mastery, they face limitations in reading documents and negotiating with clients, they also have difficulty in engaging in digital or formalized markets due to inadequate English competence. The TSEC thus situates language education as an essential component of vocational competence and not a mere skill.

The first consideration of this our proposed framework i the Needs Analysis. The Needs Analysis serves as the diagnostic rung of the Trade Specific English Curriculum. Needs analysis in ESP, as articulated by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), involves identifying the specific communicative tasks, linguistic functions, and discourse genres required in a learner's professional environment. For artisans, this stage entails mapping out the communicative events and English usage patterns entwined in trade type. For example, carpenters must interpret building specifications, welding artisans must read safety manuals, and tailors must correspond with clients through written and oral instructions. Through surveys, workplace observation, and interactional analysis, the curriculum designer identifies these trade-specific tasks to determine the linguistic forms, vocabulary sets, and communicative strategies that should constitute the core of instruction. This phase ensures that the curriculum is empirically grounded in authentic occupational realities rather than abstract grammatical syllabi.

The second phase of this Analysis involves the design of Task-Based Modules that simulate actual workplace situations and communicative demands. Each module is structured around a central task such as drafting a quotation, describing a mechanical fault, giving customer service feedback, or explaining safety procedures that requires learners to use English purposefully. Drawing from Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2018), these modules emphasize communicative performance over rote learning. Learners are guided to complete authentic tasks using language as a tool rather than as an end in itself. Through contextualized practice, they internalize the functional grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics necessary for professional communication. This approach aligns with Ebekozien et al. (2024), who underscore the importance of aligning technical skills training with communicative competence to ensure workplace readiness.

Complementing the task-based modules is the use of Authentic Materials, which expose learners to the real linguistic texture of their trades. Authenticity, a core principle in ESP pedagogy, bridges the gap between classroom instruction and the discourse of professional practice. Within the TSEC framework, instructional materials include trade manuals, equipment catalogues, safety signage, digital advertisements, and client correspondence, among others. Such resources not only familiarize artisans with technical terminology but also cultivate interpretive and critical reading skills. For instance, welders might analyze excerpts from machine maintenance manuals, while tailors could interpret online customer reviews or compose digital advertisements for their services. Authentic materials thereby foster both linguistic accuracy and contextual fluency, equipping artisans to navigate formal documents and digital communication platforms that dominate contemporary business interactions.

The fourth component, Collaborative Learning, situates language acquisition within the social dimension of vocational training. Artisans typically learn in communal workshop settings where peer interaction, mentorship, and cooperative task performance are integral to skill transmission. The TSEC framework leverages this socio-cultural context by promoting group-based English activities embedded in practical sessions. During collaborative projects, artisans use English to plan tasks, delegate roles, and solve technical problems collectively. This peer-mediated communication fosters pragmatic fluency, enhances confidence, and mirrors the interpersonal dynamics of real workplace communication. Collaborative learning also supports low-literate artisans through peer scaffolding,

allowing them to acquire communicative competence through observation and guided participation rather than isolated classroom drills.

The final stage of the TSEC framework is Performance-Based Assessment, which redefines evaluation away from traditional grammar-focused tests toward competency-oriented measurements. In line with ESP and vocational education assessment principles, learners' progress is measured through demonstrations of communicative effectiveness in authentic tasks rather than mere linguistic accuracy. Role-plays, client negotiation simulations, written quotations, oral presentations of safety procedures, and digital advertisement drafts serve as performance indicators. This approach aligns evaluation with workplace expectations, allowing both instructors and learners to assess how language proficiency translates into functional occupational competence. Through continuous formative assessment, artisans receive feedback that directly informs both their language development and professional performance.

Collectively, these five interrelated components, Needs Analysis, Task-Based Modules, Authentic Materials, Collaborative Learning, and Performance-Based Assessment, form the basis for Trade-Specific English Curriculum.

The framework operationalizes the theoretical insights of ESP by aligning language instruction with professional practice, while its task-based and collaborative dimensions ensure pedagogical relevance to the experiential nature of artisan training. In practical terms, the TSEC offers a blueprint for vocational institutions, technical colleges, and apprenticeship programs seeking to embed language instruction without disrupting existing technical curricula. It recognizes English not as an abstract academic subject but as a communicative instrument for productivity, safety, and entrepreneurial mobility.

Unlike the generic "Use of English" courses currently offered in many technical institutions, which emphasize grammar drills and essay writing detached from workplace realities, the TSEC model integrates language instruction within artisans' authentic work routines. This embedded approach ensures that linguistic learning is immediately applicable to daily vocational tasks, reinforcing retention and relevance. Implementation of the TSEC framework requires a collaborative teaching model where English language educators and trade instructors jointly design and deliver modules, drawing from trade-specific scenarios and bilingual scaffolding strategies where necessary. The program is structured for flexibility. Language sessions are embedded within practical workshops rather than taught as separate academic subjects. Assessment involves continuous performance-based evaluation using authentic communicative tasks such as client negotiations, report writing, and digital advertisement creation. Through this integration, the TSEC model transforms language instruction from an auxiliary subject into an instrument of empowerment that simultaneously develops artisans' communicative competence, professional confidence, and entrepreneurial versatility.

Ultimately, the TSEC framework contributes to the ongoing discourse on language policy and vocational education reform in Nigeria by providing a replicable model for integrating communicative competence into skills development. By equipping artisans with both technical and linguistic literacy, the framework envisions a vocational education system that produces not only skilled workers but also articulate professionals capable of navigating local and global markets. This aligns with broader national goals of economic diversification, sustainable development, and inclusive growth through education-driven empowerment.

Economic and Social Implications

The integration of English language instruction into vocational artisan training carries significant economic and social implications for Nigeria's development trajectory. At the individual

level, improved English proficiency enhances artisans' professional competence by strengthening their communication and documentation capabilities. Artisans equipped with functional English literacy can effectively interpret technical specifications, prepare accurate quotations and invoices, and engage in formal correspondence with clients and suppliers. This enhanced professionalism elevates artisans' credibility in competitive markets and increases their capacity to attract and retain clientele. Moreover, English competence enables artisans to leverage digital marketing platforms, e-commerce channels, and online technical resources, thereby facilitating entrepreneurial growth and participation in broader markets beyond localized networks.

English proficiency also has direct implications for workplace safety and productivity. Research demonstrates that artisans' inability to comprehend safety manuals, equipment labels, and regulatory instructions contributes significantly to occupational accidents. Onayade et al. (2025) found that limited literacy among construction artisans correlates with higher incidence of workplace injuries due to misinterpretation of safety protocols. By integrating English instruction focused on safety terminology and regulatory compliance, vocational programs can reduce accident rates, minimize material waste, and enhance operational efficiency. Additionally, English competence facilitates artisans' engagement with formal regulatory systems, including business registration, licensing procedures, and tax compliance, thereby supporting their transition from the informal to the formal economy. This formalization enhances legal protection, access to financial services, and integration into value chains that demand certified services.

At the national level, addressing linguistic skill gaps among artisans has the potential to stimulate productivity growth and reduce Nigeria's dependence on foreign-certified artisans. According to NewsWireNGR (2023), Nigeria loses approximately $10 billion annually due to reliance on imported certified welders and artisans, largely attributable to local artisans' inadequacy in meeting international communication standards. By equipping Nigerian artisans with both technical expertise and English proficiency, the country can develop a competitive, globally recognized workforce capable of meeting domestic and international demand. Consequently, the integration of English instruction into vocational training emerges as a strategic intervention aligned with national economic diversification, industrialization, and sustainable development goals.

Stakeholders indicate that bodies like NBTE should revise curricular standards to embed ESP content. This includes training English teachers with specificity to trade vocabulary and communicative function. Apprenticeship regulation, dual education models (mixing classroom and workplace) are promising (FG artisan-led mentorship, NESRI, 2025) (Nairametrics, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Integrating English language instruction into vocational artisan training is essential for improving professional competence and advancing economic empowerment in Nigeria, as English proficiency serves not only academic purposes but also facilitates effective workplace communication, occupational safety, and entrepreneurial success. A contextualized, task-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework can bridge linguistic gaps and connect language learning to artisans' professional realities, enhancing competitiveness and inclusion in the formal economy. To realize this, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should adopt trade-specific ESP modules focusing on technical documentation, quotation writing, safety communication, and digital interaction. Collaborative teacher training, linking language educators with trade instructors, alongside government support through funding, infrastructure improvement, and dual-training systems, will ensure program effectiveness. Furthermore, embedding digital English literacy

and performance-based certification assessments will better prepare artisans for both traditional and digital marketplaces. Future research should examine the long-term impact of integrating ESP-based instruction into vocational education on artisans' employability, income mobility, and participation in Nigeria's evolving digital economy.

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