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Research Article

TRAINING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH FOR EMPLOYEES IN SOFTWARE COMPANIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY – VIETNAM

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Abstract

In the context of globalization and the rapid expansion of Vietnam's software industry, English communication competence has become an indispensable requirement for information technology professionals. This study examines the current status, challenges, and training practices related to English communication skills among employees working in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to 330 employees occupying various roles, including software developers, testers, business analysts, and product managers. The findings reveal several critical issues, such as unequal access to English training opportunities, an imbalance in skill development with a predominant focus on speaking over writing, and a limited availability of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs tailored to the software industry. Based on these findings, the study proposes a set of practical recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of English communication skills training in software enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
Keywords: English communication skills, English for Specific Purposes, software industry, Ho Chi Minh City

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1. Introduction

According to recent statistics released by the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Information and Communications, by the

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end of 2023 the city hosted 22,773 information and communication technology (ICT) enterprises, of which approximately 10,300 were software companies, accounting for 45.3% of all software-producing enterprises nationwide. These figures underscore Ho Chi Minh City's role as the leading hub of Vietnam's software industry and, simultaneously, highlight the growing demand for a highly qualified workforce.

Within the IT–software labor market, enterprises typically employ personnel across a wide range of functional roles, including software developers (frontend, backend, and full-stack), QA/QC engineers (manual and automation), DevOps and system engineers, project and product managers, UI/UX designers, business analysts, technical writers, IT support staff, and technology-focused sales and presales specialists. Each role requires distinct professional competencies and varying degrees of English language use, ranging from reading technical documentation to participating in discussions, preparing reports, and negotiating with international clients and partners.

Regarding language requirements, surveys conducted by VietnamWorks and TopITworks indicate that approximately 9% of IT vacancies require strong foreign language proficiency at the recruitment stage. This proportion increases to 15–20% for positions such as project management, quality assurance, and presales, which involve frequent interaction with international stakeholders. In Ho Chi Minh City, where international projects constitute a substantial share of software outsourcing activities, an estimated 12–15% of contracts explicitly require employees to possess advanced English communication skills to ensure effective coordination and project quality.

Despite these demands, the actual English proficiency of the workforce remains a significant constraint. Only 22% of IT candidates self-report an advanced level of English proficiency (CEFR C1 or above), while merely 20% of technical staff reach the B2 level, which is generally considered the minimum threshold for active participation in professional meetings and in-depth discussions. Reports from ManpowerGroup Vietnam further indicate that 24% of ICT enterprises have fewer than half of their employees able to use English effectively, and 30% report that fewer than 10% of their staff meet international job requirements. This mismatch contributes to delayed communication, misunderstandings, and reduced overall productivity.

Against this backdrop, improving English proficiency across all occupational groups in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City has become an urgent priority. In addition to expanding business scale and diversifying job roles, enterprises need to collaborate with universities and reputable training providers to implement ESP programs, integrate language proficiency indicators into performance evaluation systems, and leverage educational technologies—such as learning management systems (LMS), microlearning, and AI-assisted tools—to create continuous, personalized, and measurable learning environments.

2. Theoretical framework

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of English communication training needs among employees in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City, this study adopts the needs analysis framework proposed by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). This framework, widely applied in ESP research, emphasizes the systematic identification of learners' professional communication requirements and serves as the theoretical basis for the design of the survey questionnaire.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design aimed at collecting systematic and reliable data on the current status of English communication skills and the training needs of employees working in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City. A survey-based approach was employed as the primary data collection method, utilizing a structured questionnaire designed to reflect the characteristics of the software industry and the specific profile of the target population.

3.2 Research Instrument

The research instrument was developed based on the needs analysis framework proposed by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998). This framework was operationalized into a questionnaire to capture multi-dimensional data concerning both the existing level of English communication competence and the perceived needs for English communication skills training among software company employees.

3.3 Participants

A total of 330 respondents participated in the survey. All participants were employees currently working in software-related fields, including software development, system and software design, data engineering, business analysis, software testing, marketing, and sales.

Among the respondents, 86.4% were male and 13.6% female, reflecting the persistent gender imbalance in Vietnam's IT sector. This imbalance may influence training design, as male employees often demonstrate confidence in technical discussions but may exhibit reluctance in spoken language practice, whereas female employees, despite being fewer in number, tend to engage more actively in small-group

communication activities.

In terms of professional roles, vevelopers accounted for 59.1% of the sample, followed by testers (9.1%), business analysts (6.8%), and product managers (6.8%). Other roles—such as system designers, data engineers, marketing staff, and sales personnel—each represented less than 5%. While the dominance of developers reflects prevailing recruitment trends, the notable proportion of testers and business analysts underscores the widespread need for English communication skills beyond purely technical positions.

Regarding Company size, the surveyed companies varied considerably in size: 13.6% employed fewer than 10 staff members, 28.8% employed 11–50, 39.4% employed 51–100, and 18.2% employed more than 100. Nearly 70% of respondents worked in companies with 11–100 employees, suggesting that English training solutions must balance systematic structure with operational flexibility.

4. Results and Discussions

Importance of English for Work

Survey results show that 50% of respondents rated English as "very important" and 33.3% as "important" for their current jobs. Overall, 83.3% identified English as a critical factor in their work. Only 8.3% considered it "moderately important," and another 8.3% deemed it unimportant. This confirms the high demand for English usage in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City, particularly in an internationalized working environment involving global clients and English-language technical documentation.

English Proficiency in Meeting Job Requirements

Most respondents (59%) rated their English proficiency as only "moderately meeting" job requirements. Meanwhile, 8% believed they met requirements "very well," 25% "well," and 8% admitted they did not meet requirements. This highlights a substantial gap between workplace demands and actual language competence.

Access to English Training

Approximately 52% of respondents reported having participated in English training programs—either company-organized or self-initiated—while 48% had never received formal training. This near-even split suggests that although half of the workforce has sought training, a significant proportion still lacks systematic access.

Duration of English Training

A large proportion (75%) reported participating in English training for more than one year, indicating long-term learning commitment consistent with Knowles' Self-Directed Learning theory. However, 25% participated for less than one year—particularly the under-six-month group (17%)—who are at risk of dropping out due to insufficient motivation or support.

Training Focus and Skills Development

Training primarily focused on general communication skills (66.7%), while specialized English (16.7%), translation (8.3%), interpretation (8.3%), and test preparation (8.3%) were far less common. Listening–speaking skills dominated (50%), followed by reading (25%), whereas writing, grammar, and integrated skills each accounted for only 8.3%. This reflects a strong emphasis on oral communication at the expense of written and technical language competencies.

Training Formats and Locations

Training formats were evenly distributed among self-study, online learning, and company-organized programs (each 25%). Most learners studied at home (41.7%) or at the workplace (33.3%), underscoring the preference for flexible, work-integrated learning modes.

English Usage in the Workplace

English was most frequently used in oral communication with foreign partners (72.3%), reading professional documents (72.2%), and other purposes such as self-study and technical updates (68.1%). Academic activities—such as writing research papers (25.1%) or conference presentations (40.1%)—were less common.

Table 1: *Frequency of English Language Use in Selected Communication Domains*

Order	**Domain of English language use**	**Level 3-5 (Likert scale)**		**Ranking ***
		Number participants	Percentage (%)	
1	Oral communication with international partners	239	72,3	1
2	Delivering presentations at seminars and conferences	132	40,1	8
3	Participating in discussions at seminars and conferences	117	35,5	9
4	Writing professional and business correspondence	200	60,5	5
5	Writing technical or project reports	157	47,7	7
6	Writing academic or	83	25,1	10

	research papers			
7	Reading official documents and business correspondence	206	62,5	4
8	Reading technical reports and professional documentatio	238	72,2	2
9	Translating documents and correspondence	184	55,8	6
10	Using English for other purposes	225	68,1	3

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

In the context of globalization and digital transformation, the demand for English language use in software companies has become increasingly urgent, not only to facilitate internal communication but also to support international collaboration and the processing of professional documentation. However, survey data collected from employees working in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City reveal several persistent shortcomings in English communication skills training, as outlined below.

First, access to English training remains uneven. The survey indicates that only 52% of respondents have participated in English training programs, while 48% have never received formal training. This proportion is particularly concerning given the growing internationalization of the software industry and the rising demand for foreign language competence. The findings suggest significant disparities in learning opportunities, especially among small- and medium-sized enterprises that often lack systematic and well-defined training policies.

Second, training duration lacks continuity and systematic structure. Although 75% of respondents reported participating in English training for more than one year, a substantial proportion (25%) had engaged in training for less than one year, including 17% for under six months. This pattern indicates a high risk of discontinuation, limited learner commitment, and reduced training effectiveness.

Third, training programs exhibit a pronounced imbalance in skill focus. While 66.7% of respondents received training primarily in oral communication skills, far fewer reported training in writing (8.3%), grammar (8.3%), or integrated language skills. This imbalance undermines employees' ability to produce professional written texts, deliver structured technical content, and effectively access specialized documentation.

Fourth, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs are insufficiently developed. Despite working in a highly technical field, only 16.7% of respondents reported receiving training in software-specific English. The majority participated in general communication courses (66.7%) or general English programs (22.2%). The lack of occupation-specific course design and specialized vocabulary limits learners' ability to apply English effectively in professional contexts, negatively affecting work performance, document processing, and technical interaction in international projects.

Fifth, training formats and learning locations lack formalization. Self-study (25%) and online learning (25%) were more prevalent than structured or instructor-guided training programs. This trend results in limited quality control and the absence of systematic mechanisms for monitoring learning progress. Furthermore, the fact that most respondents studied at home (41.7%) or online (25%), while only 19.4% were officially sponsored by their companies, indicates a relatively weak institutional role in organizing and managing English training activities.

Sixth, employees' English proficiency remains insufficient to meet job requirements. As many as 59% of respondents rated their English competence as only "moderately meeting" workplace demands, while just 8% considered their proficiency to be "very good." This finding highlights a substantial gap between job requirements and actual language competence, reflecting the growing mismatch between individual capabilities and the expectations of an increasingly internationalized working environment.

Finally, practical language use skills remain limited. A considerable proportion of respondents reported difficulties in expressing ideas fluently (59.7%), understanding partners' messages (52.8%), writing professional texts (51.4%), and using accurate grammar (47.2%). These weaknesses directly affect work efficiency, particularly in email communication and presentations delivered to international clients, and clearly demonstrate deficiencies in practical English language competence.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, several critical limitations can be clearly identified in the current practices of English communication skills training for employees working in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City. These limitations include uneven access to training opportunities, insufficient continuity and systematic structure in training duration, imbalanced skill development, a lack of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, insufficiently formalized training formats and learning locations, low levels of English

proficiency in meeting job requirements, and weak practical language use skills.

In response to these challenges, the study proposes the following groups of solutions to enhance the effectiveness of English communication skills training for employees in software companies in Ho Chi Minh City.

Establishing Mandatory and Standardized English Training Policies

To address the lack of commitment and consistency in English training, software companies should develop internal policies that clearly define language learning pathways and English proficiency requirements for each job position. Such policies may include entrance and exit proficiency standards aligned with international frameworks such as the CEFR or IELTS, regulations on minimum training duration, financial support for learning activities, and regular assessment procedures. Mandatory training policies not only raise learners' awareness of the importance of English but also contribute to the development of a learning-oriented organizational culture (Senge, 1990). These policies should be widely communicated and integrated into recruitment processes, performance evaluations, and employee reward systems.

Increasing Financial and Human Resource Investment in ESP Programs

Given the highly specialized nature of the software industry, enterprises should invest in developing occupation-specific English training programs, such as English for software developers, project managers, and quality assurance engineers. This approach requires close collaboration between language specialists and technical experts to ensure content relevance and practical applicability. Software companies may partner with universities or training institutions with expertise in ESP to design appropriate curricula. Effective budget allocation should prioritize flexible, modular training models that combine online and face-to-face instruction (blended learning), thereby reducing costs while accommodating employees' work schedules.

Innovating Teaching Methods through Personalization and Practical Orientation

Rather than relying on traditional grammar-translation approaches, corporate English training programs should adopt learner-centered methodologies that emphasize practical application and workplace relevance. Training activities may include simulations of online meetings, technical report writing, and product presentations for international clients. According to Knowles' (1984) theory of adult learning, adult learners acquire knowledge most effectively through experience, practice, and real-world application. Therefore, instructors are encouraged to implement project-based learning and task-based learning approaches that enable learners to develop professional and linguistic competencies simultaneously.

Supporting Guided Self-Directed Learning Pathways

Given the high proportion of employees engaging in self-study at home (41.7%), enterprises should provide structured support mechanisms to guide autonomous learning. These may include the development of digital learning resource libraries, short thematic e-learning courses, personalized learning pathways based on individual proficiency levels, and internal mentoring programs involving employees with strong English competence. This approach aligns with the Self-Directed Learning model proposed by Knowles (1975), which emphasizes learner autonomy supported by systematic guidance to sustain motivation and ensure effectiveness. In addition, companies may leverage external learning platforms such as Coursera and Udemy, as well as AI-assisted tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT, to support continuous self-learning.

Developing CEFR-Aligned English Proficiency Assessment Criteria

The absence of clear assessment tools often results in training programs lacking clear objectives and measurable outcomes. Software companies should establish English proficiency assessment criteria aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), tailored to different employee groups and job-specific requirements. Assessment systems should incorporate both qualitative measures (e.g., written tasks, simulated dialogues, client feedback) and quantitative measures (e.g., tests and certifications). Collaboration with testing centers or the use of internal assessment tools, combined with entry, mid-term, and exit evaluations, can facilitate effective monitoring of learners' progress.

Implementing Flexible Training Models Integrated with Work Schedules

To overcome time-related constraints, companies should design flexible training models such as lunchtime sessions, 24/7 online modular courses, microlearning formats (5–10 minutes per day), or the integration of English tasks into daily work activities. Training programs should allow learners to study at their own pace while receiving regular feedback from instructors or mentors. This approach reflects contemporary corporate training trends, which emphasize efficiency, flexibility, and learner autonomy.

Strengthening Collaboration between Enterprises and Professional Training Institutions

Software companies should proactively establish partnerships with reputable universities and language training institutions to design English programs tailored to specific job requirements. Customized in-company training models can enhance training quality, improve relevance, and reduce training duration compared to generic programs. Additionally, enterprises may invite instructors to deliver on-site training or engage international experts to provide practical English instruction within real project contexts.

Fostering a Culture of Continuous Learning

Finally, enterprises should cultivate and sustain a lifelong learning culture in which English proficiency is regarded as an integral component of professional competence. Learning-enhancement activities—such as English learning days, rewards for certification achievement, internal communication clubs, and expert-led seminars—can motivate employees and strengthen organizational learning capacity. As emphasized by Senge (1990), a learning organization is one in which individuals continually expand their capabilities to achieve desired outcomes, a principle that modern enterprises should actively pursue.

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