

# English Language Lacks of Textile and Apparel Fashion Technology Trainees of Ethiopia Technical and Vocational Training Institute

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of English language proficiency and difficulties among trainees at the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Technical and Vocational Training Institute (TVETI). With English proficiency being increasingly vital for global career success, particularly in technical fields such as textile and apparel fashion, it is crucial to explore the language needs and challenges in the under-researched Ethiopian TVET context. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered from 128 trainees through questionnaires, observations, and interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 24, and qualitative data were analyzed using MAXQDA 24. The results showed that trainees perceived writing and speaking as the most difficult macro-skill. Within writing, tasks like reports and proposals were especially challenging due to issues with organization, structure, and grammar usage. For speaking sub-skills, presentations and describing diagrams became difficult for trainees as these were related to clarity and vocabulary. Comprehension of spoken content in class and taking notes were considered challenging due to rapid speech and accents that were not familiar. When it comes to reading sub-skills, understanding complex and specialized vocabulary was most difficult with technical reports and manuals. Trainees also expressed difficulties in understanding models and instructions. Generally, the results indicate inadequacies in skills needed for future studies and careers. Incorporating language instruction combined with real-world practice in all areas could improve trainees' skills to meet the language requirements of their technical fields.

## 1. Introduction

In today's global job market, English language proficiency is increasingly important, particularly in technical and vocational fields (Miftah, 2015; Tabalan, 2016). English has become the dominant language for global communication in various domains, including science, academia, and industry, due to increasing internationalization (Ammon, 2016; Swales, 2004). This is especially evident in the fashion sector, where outsourcing manufacturing to countries like Ethiopia is common. Proficiency in spoken and written English is essential for effective cross-border collaboration, which is vital in this globalized industry (Coe & Yeung, 2015; Roshid, 2014).

The advancements in digital technology have further emphasized the importance of written English competency in fashion careers (Wang & Grosse, 2023). E-commerce requires fluent electronic correspondence, while telephone conversations are crucial for client interactions (Simie & McKinley, 2024). In addition, strong writing abilities are essential for creating marketing materials, descriptive documents, and reports (Roshid, 2014).

Given the increasing linguistic demands, technical training programs should focus on developing diverse English skills valued by recruiters (Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015). However, there is a lack of contextualized understanding regarding the specific language needs and

challenges faced by trainees (Alrasheed, 2019; Chen, 2003). Addressing these gaps becomes crucial for optimizing learning outcomes and enhancing career opportunities (Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015).

In Ethiopia, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs prioritize practical skills over theory and use local languages alongside English as the medium of instruction (Belachew, 2020). This poses challenges when trainees transition to higher levels of education that use English as the primary language (Hasan & Karim, 2019). The lack of formal English language courses within the TVET curriculum and the use of local languages can create a linguistic divide for trainees. This study aims to explore the challenges faced by Ethiopian TVET trainees in developing English language proficiency, which is crucial for academic success and career readiness, especially when considering the transition to higher technical and vocational training institute (Hasan & Karim, 2019; Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015). Understanding the specific linguistic challenges faced by trainees will have implications for educational policy and practice (Belachew, 2020; Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015).

Limited English proficiency among TVET trainees often limits their job and academic opportunities (Carrell & Wise, 1998; Tabalan, 2016). It can hinder their access to resources, collaboration, adaptation to technology, workplace communication, and further education (Aina et al., 2013; Kambara et al., 2023; Nur'Ain Mohsin et al., 2023). Improving English proficiency is crucial for addressing these challenges and enhancing employability, access to resources, engagement, adaptability, communication, and career prospects (De Cao et al., 2022; Nusrat & Sultana, 2019; Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015). However, there is limited research on the English language needs of trainees from non-Western regions, including Ethiopia (Chen, 2003; Roshid, 2014). Understanding the requirements in different cultural contexts is important in the face of globalization and technological changes that impact language learning needs (Hasan & Karim, 2019; Tajuddin & Jauhar, 2015).

This research gap underscores the need to explore the English language needs of trainees from various regions to broaden our understanding (Alrasheed, 2019; Chen, 2003). This study aims to address the specific challenges faced by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Technical and Vocational Training Institute trainees in terms of English language proficiency. The lack of proficiency in the English language hinders their ability to develop comprehensive teaching, training, learning materials, operation sheets, and assessments. This lack of proficiency is particularly significant in the textile and apparel fashion technology field, where communication, interpretation, and information

synthesis skills are crucial for success. Proficiency in macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and related sub-skills enhances collaboration, knowledge sharing, independent learning, and task completion. Therefore, it is essential to explore the trainees' perceptions of difficulty in various macro-skills and sub-skills to enhance language training programs.

Previous studies examining the English language needs of textile and apparel fashion trainees have primarily focused on regions such as South Asia and the Middle East. For instance, Ammanabrolu and Riedl (2021) and Tividad (2024) have examined trainees' self-perceived English competencies through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. By exploring trainees' perceived difficulties across English macro-skills and sub-skills, these studies have identified areas requiring targeted language training. Similarly, researches conducted by Kassim and Ali (2010), and Sharma et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of English language proficiency for effective communication and employability in the fashion industry.

Drawing on the existing literature and methodologies employed in previous studies, this research will adopt a mixed-methods approach. It will involve surveys, interviews, and observations to collect data on the challenges faced by FDRE TVT Institute trainees in developing their English language proficiency. The study will aim to identify the specific macro-skills and sub-skills within the English language that pose difficulties for trainees, as well as their perceptions of the impact of these challenges on their academic and career prospects. Thus, for this study, the researchers developed the following four specific objectives:

- a. Assess trainees' perceptions regarding the difficulty of language macro-skills in the context of textile and apparel fashion technology.
- b. Identify trainees' perceptions regarding the difficulty of sub-skills in the context of textile, and apparel fashion technology.
- c. Determine the most challenging language macro-skills and sub-skills based on trainees' difficulty ratings.
- d. Aware teachers to adapt their teaching strategies and curricula to effectively assist trainees in improving their most difficult language skills.

The findings of this study can inform the development of targeted language training programs within FDRE TVTI and other vocational education institutions. By addressing the specific language needs of trainees, these programs can enhance their English language proficiency; consequently, increase the likelihood their employability in the fashion industry.

Besides, the research can contribute to a broader understanding of English language requirements in non-Western regions, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by trainees from different cultural backgrounds.

## 2. Literature Review

Situated learning theory emphasizes learning in authentic contexts, influenced by social interactions, cultural practices, and physical surroundings (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leaman & Flanagan, 2013). Learners construct knowledge through active participation, collaboration, and drawing on prior experiences (Brown et al., 2000). According to this theory, learning is not solely a cognitive process but is influenced by the social interactions, cultural practices, and physical surroundings in which it occurs. Learners construct knowledge by actively participating in authentic activities, collaborating with others, and drawing upon their prior experiences and cultural backgrounds (Brown et al., 2000). This approach aims to enhance the transferability and application of knowledge and skills to real-life situations.

In the global textile industry, English proficiency is crucial for communication in manufacturing, supply chain management, customer relations, and technical documentation (Coe & Yeung, 2015). The growth of e-commerce raises the demand for strong written English skills (Wang & Grosse, 2023), while oral communication is essential for phone contacts (Simie & McKinley, 2024).

Given these workplace demands, extensive research has focused on understanding the specific language needs of textile and apparel trainees. Studies have explored various skill areas, including writing, speaking, listening, and reading, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by learners (Alrasheed, 2019; Hyland, 2008; Hyland, 2013; Kobayashi, 2005; Novriyani & Nurweni, 2018; Peverly et al., 2007). Writing studies have identified difficulties with structure, cohesiveness, and grammar among Hong Kong undergraduates (Evans & Green, 2007), while explicit training has shown to improve outcomes for Ghanaian students (Bediako, 2020; Hyland, 2013). Verbatim transcription is less effective than selective note-taking in terms of information retention (Kobayashi, 2005; Piolat et al., 2005).

Comprehension in garment and apparel training is influenced by characteristics like delivery speed, accents, noise, encoding technique, and multitasking (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Kobayashi, 2005; Vandergrift, 2004). During lectures, active listening and note-making, aligned with socio-cognitive theories of skill development, play a crucial role in capturing concepts systematically and maximizing learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Peverly et

al., 2007; Zimmerman, 2008). Technical materials, due to their specific content and language, require higher levels of analytical thinking and familiarity compared to regular books (Chen, 2003). Regardless of skill levels, confidence, attitudes, and experiences significantly impact oral abilities (Buhari & Hanafi, 2022; Clément et al., 2003). While the existing research provides valuable insights, there is a lack of localized studies, particularly from non-Western contexts (Alrasheed, 2019; Chen, 2003). Despite the importance of tailoring support to specific needs, little is known about the perceived challenges faced by Ethiopian trainees. Studies have found a strong association between the frameworks of socio-cognitive and situated learning theory, which emphasize the development of contextual competence through individualized and authentic practice (Ammanabrolu & Riedl, 2021; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

To bridge the linguistic gaps in Ethiopian textile and apparel fashion training, focused exploration is necessary. Assessing language abilities assists in revising curricula to meet industry needs (Gözüyeşil, 2014). One of the challenges is that trainees' primary languages are not always used when referring to technical vocabulary in English (Babson, 2014). This issue could be addressed through multimodal, multilingual education (Babson, 2014). Incorporating occupation-specific vocabulary and communication approaches into technical curricula improves tailored English training and enhances workforce readiness (Astawa et al., 2017; Kurnia et al., 2014). International models suggest that combining linguistic and vocational education facilitates smoother transitions into post-study employment (Xie, 2021).

Skill development can be supported through targeted tactics such as industry seminars, immersion programs, and specialized courses that foster confidence in professional usage (Rashtchi & Porkar, 2020). Anticipating obstacles enhances linguistic identity based on past experiences (Rashtchi & Porkar, 2020). Proficient English-speaking abilities improve marketability and enable access to international markets, which is crucial for industrial integration (Babson, 2014). To achieve optimal results, garment and apparel fashion institutes must continue exploring effective methods and implementing curriculum revisions that promote improved industry integration (Astawa et al., 2017). In general, enhanced localized comprehension can facilitate language acquisition and align with technical proficiency, leading to success in international careers.

In summary, Situated learning theory highlights authentic, socially influenced learning. Research addresses trainees' language challenges in writing, listening, and speaking. Integrating job-specific vocabulary and communication strategies into technical

curricula, supported by seminars and specialized courses, strengthens English proficiency, boosting employability and global career success.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Sampling Technique**

The Institute is composed of eight faculties: Textile and Apparel Fashion Technology, Civil Technology, Mechanical Technology, Agro Processing, Electrical Electronics and ICT, Pedagogy, TVET Leadership and Governance, and Common Courses and Computational Sciences. A multi-stage stratified sampling method was used, beginning with the categorization of faculties into technical and non-technical groups. The technical faculties were prioritized because of their relevance to the Institute's core mission. From the five technical faculties, the researcher then randomly selected the Textile and Apparel Fashion Technology Faculty, which includes four departments: Textile, Leather, Garment, and Fashion Technology.

After selecting the Textile and Apparel Fashion Technology Faculty, the researcher randomly selected the Textile Department from the four strata. This approach aimed to capture representative insights that reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives within the Textile and Apparel Fashion Technology Faculty, thereby strengthening the validity and applicability of the study's findings.

The total population of Textile Department trainees was divided into three strata based on their study programs: regular, summer, and extension (evening and weekend). This method allowed for proportional representation from each group. The sampling frame included 41 regular trainees, 60 summer trainees, and 46 extension trainees.

Using [Krejcie and Morgan's \(1970\)](#) statistical formula and table for determining sample sizes, the required sample was calculated to be 128 participants. The sample size was allocated proportionally across the strata based on the population ratios, resulting in 36 regular trainees, 52 summer trainees, and 40 extension trainees. While proportional allocation can help control for potential bias, it may also limit the diversity of the sample. This approach minimizes the risk of over or under-representing a particular group, thereby reducing potential bias in the findings. It also allows for more accurate comparisons and generalizations to be made about the entire population based on the sample.

#### **3.2 Data Collection Instruments**

A mixed methods approach was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the language needs of

textile and apparel fashion technology trainees. The primary instrument used was a questionnaire administered to the 128 sampled participants. The questionnaire contained a combination of closed-ended and open-ended items, allowing for the collection of structured quantitative data. It gathered demographic information and assessed trainees' perceptions of difficulty for various language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Participants were asked to rate the level of difficulty on a 5-point Likert scale, providing quantitative data for statistical analysis and comparison.

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a random selection of 15 trainees. These interviews were conducted in the local language to obtain rich and descriptive feedback from the participants. The interviews provided an opportunity for trainees to elaborate on their perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to language skills in a more open-ended and conversational manner. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for qualitative analysis.

Furthermore, nine observation sessions were undertaken to observe trainees' language use in practical activities. These observations were conducted during regular training sessions and involved the researcher observing and taking field notes on trainees' language production, interaction, and engagement. The observations provided insights into the actual language performance of the trainees and allowed for a comparison with their self-reported perceptions.

Using multiple data collection methods allowed the study to capture a more varied and comprehensive understanding of the trainees' perceptions and experiences related to language difficulties in the context of textile and apparel fashion technology. This multi-method approach, which combined the questionnaire, interviews, and observations, provided triangulation of data sources, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to determine frequencies, means, standard deviations, and variability in perceived difficulties. This analysis provided a quantitative overview and comparison of the participants' perceptions.

The interview transcripts were thematically analyzed through an inductive coding process to identify prominent themes and patterns. This qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the trainees' experiences and perceptions of language difficulties. The

field notes from the observation sessions were examined for patterns relating to actual language performance compared to self-reports.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, a constant comparative analysis was employed to cross-validate the quantitative and qualitative data. This process involved comparing and discussing the findings from the questionnaire, interviews, and observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the language needs of textile and apparel fashion technology trainees. The theoretical lens of socio-cognitive and situated learning frameworks was used to interpret the results and provide a theoretical context for the findings.

The data analysis process was facilitated by using SPSS 24 software for quantitative analysis and MAXQDA 24 software for organizing and coding the qualitative data. This allowed for efficient data management and systematic analysis, ensuring the accuracy and rigor of the analysis process.

The detailed methodology section presented above clearly outlines the steps taken for representative sampling, multi-method data collection, and rigorous analysis. This transparency enhances the generalizability of the study and provides a solid foundation for the interpretation of the findings.

### 3.4 Limitations

Taking into account additional contextual variables could significantly enhance the external validity of this study. A more comprehensive investigation into individual characteristics, such as varying learning styles, prior experiences, or personal attributes that may influence self-efficacy, would provide a richer

understanding of the underlying factors at play. Future research should prioritize these variables to deepen insights and expand the applicability of findings across diverse contexts.

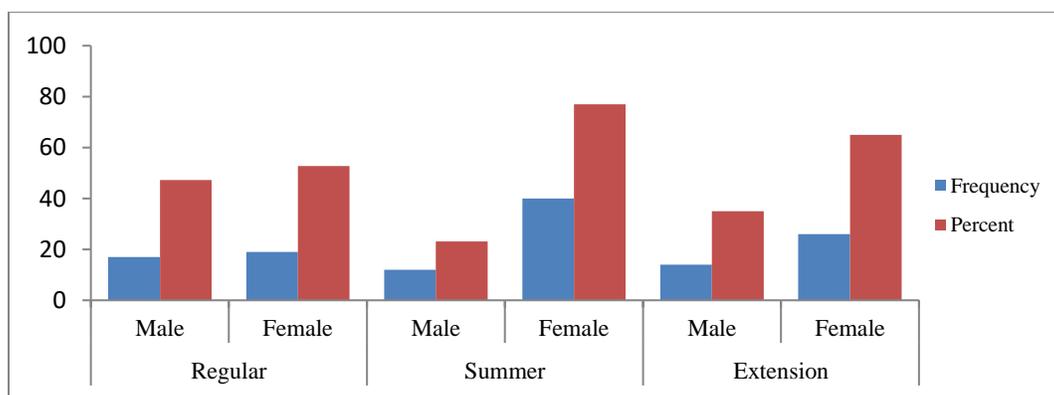
Moreover, relying solely on self-reported data collected through questionnaires may limit the robustness of the conclusions. To counter this, incorporating objective measures of proficiency, such as standardized assessments or performance-based evaluations, alongside subjective perceptions, could offer a more holistic and reliable depiction of the phenomena being studied. This dual approach would ensure that the findings are grounded in both personal experience and measurable outcomes, thereby providing a balanced and nuanced perspective.

## 4. Results

This section presents the key findings from the study based on the analysis of collected data. The results aim to address each of the research objectives outlined earlier. The results are organized into pertinent subsections that deal with the trainees' backgrounds and their assessments of the difficulty of different language macro-skills and sub-skills. To give a comprehensive picture of participants' experiences, qualitative information from interviews is added to quantitative data from surveys.

### 4.1 Background of Trainees

In this section, we provide an overview of the background characteristics of the trainees who participated in the study. The analysis of frequency graphs offers valuable insights into the profile of the 128 trainee respondents.



**Figure 1.** Trainees' Gender and Category

In all streams, there are more female trainees than male trainees. More specifically, there are 35.6% of male trainees and 64.4% of female trainees. This results in a gender ratio that is roughly 2:1 in favor of women, indicating that the viewpoints and experiences that are

reflected in the sample are more in line with what a female trainee would go through. If we break this down by stream, 52.8% of trainees in the regular program are female and 47.2% are male, indicating a well-balanced ratio. On the other hand, there is a notable gender

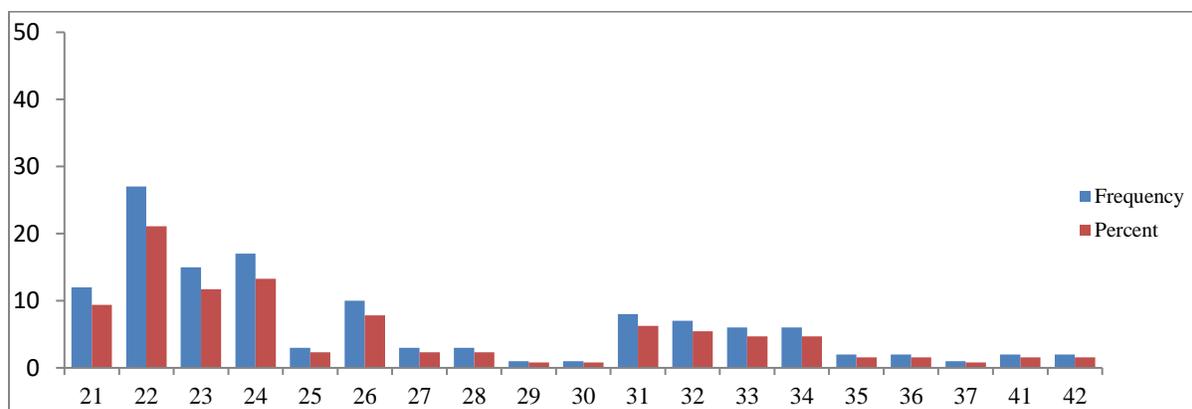
disparity in the summer program, with only 23.1% of trainees being male and 76.9% of trainees being female. The extension program also reflects a strong female majority, with 65.0% of the trainees being female and 35.0% male. Across all streams, female representation is consistently higher, particularly in the summer program.

With 39.4% of the sample, in the summer program more trainees were enrolled. The regular program has the fewest participants, accounting for 27.3% of the trainees, while the extension program comes in second with 30.3% of the total.

Within these categories, there is a clear female majority in the summer and extension programs. This shows that women are especially drawn to these flexible study options. In comparison to the other streams, the

Regular program exhibits a more balanced gender ratio despite its smaller size. Given that the summer and extension programs are more flexible than the regular program, many trainees—especially women—may be juggling their studies with other obligations, either personal or professional.

This demographic profile, characterized by a predominance of female trainees and a preference for flexible learning formats, highlights the importance of offering support structures tailored to the needs of working professionals or those with other commitments. The data suggests that the learning environment should be sensitive to these needs, particularly for female trainees who make up the majority in most streams



**Figure 2. Age of Trainees**

The majority of respondents (57.81%) were aged 20-25. As traditional undergraduates, they have few outside responsibilities competing for time but may lack work/life experience to contextualize concepts. Exposure to English instruction varied, and academic language's abstractness could challenge without practical application opportunities. According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (2014) younger trainees do better on organized grammar examinations, according to certain research, while adults outperform on communicative/meaning-based activities, probably as a result of life experiences. However, given specific factors, both groups can succeed just as much.

Those aged 26-30 (14.06%) balanced their first jobs and families with their studies, making pragmatic language skills essential for both professional advancement and community engagement. Many felt somewhat competent but driven to improve when using English professionally or personally after graduating from college.

It is crucial for the 31-40 age group (25%) to acquire English proficiency in conjunction with stable

employment and families in order to promote career mobility. Significant work and life experience helps to contextualize new concepts, yet returning to school after years away might be difficult. Achievement is driven by practicality.

After an extended layoff, the 41-45 group (3.13%) suffers the biggest academic challenges, but they make up for it with maturity, subject matter mastery, and more obvious skill objectives. Self-driven, self-paced learning works well for hectic schedules when assistance encourages independence and flexibility. These age groups and language learning notions are in line with Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) who stated that physical maturation influences early skills but not ultimate proficiency.

Overall, life experience and aging may lessen language barriers, but lack of appropriate support can impede due to conflicting responsibilities or time away. All age groups benefit from strong motivation derived from personal and professional goals. Personalized support that considers a range of situations improves the learning environment.

## 4.2. Trainees' Difficulty of English Language Skills

In this section, an overview of the trainees' assessments of each macro-skill's difficulty is presented. The trainees were asked to rate the difficulty for various macro-skills, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary, on a 5-point Likert scale. The perceived difficulty of linked sub-skills is next examined in subsections.

### 4.2.1. Trainees' Perception of Difficulty of Macro-skills

This subsection presents trainees' ratings of six key – skills and language knowledge areas—listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary—based on a 5-point Likert scale. To contextualize the perceived difficulties, the analysis incorporates trends and illustrative qualitative feedback.

**Table 1.** Trainees' rating of the difficulties of macro-skills

Macro-skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Speaking	128	2	5	4.39	0.74
Writing	128	3	5	4.39	0.76
Listening	128	2	5	4.19	0.95
Reading	128	1	5	3.64	1.30
Grammar	128	1	5	3.52	1.27
Vocabulary	128	1	5	3.15	1.40

Based on the analysis of macro-skills ratings, speaking and writing were identified as the most challenging skills for textile trainees, both with a mean score of 4.39. These scores highlight the difficulties trainees face when trying to articulate their thoughts and ideas verbally or organize them in written form. The challenges likely arise from the need to demonstrate fluency, coherence, and accuracy, which are essential in both academic and professional contexts. As such, these productive skills, which require more active use of language, present significant barriers for the trainees.

Listening follows as the next most difficult skill, with a mean score of 4.19, indicating that trainees find it moderately difficult to comprehend spoken information in various formats such as lectures and discussions. The difficulty in listening is compounded by the need to process not just the language, but also the flow of conversations, accents, and complexity of delivery, all of which contribute to the challenges trainees face in understanding spoken language.

Reading, with a mean score of 3.64, appears to be less difficult but still presents notable challenges. Trainees encounter difficulties when reading technical documents, textbooks, and other materials that require them to extract and comprehend complex information, which is vital for their studies in textiles. On the lower end of the difficulty spectrum, grammar and vocabulary were rated with mean scores of 3.52 and 3.15, respectively. Although trainees find these aspects of language less

challenging than speaking, writing, and listening, they still encounter obstacles in correctly applying grammatical rules and expanding their technical vocabulary in the context of textile studies. These challenges, while moderate, can affect their overall language proficiency and performance.

Interviewee 8 emphasized the difficulty of ensuring proper grammar and vocabulary usage in writing. He expressed that while he strives to convey his ideas accurately, he struggles with selecting the appropriate words or constructing grammatically correct sentences. This difficulty impacts the clarity and precision of his writing, making it harder for his audience to fully grasp his intended message. Similarly, interviewee 6 stated that when it came to expressing themselves effectively in written form, they encountered several challenges. One of the main difficulties was organizing their thoughts coherently. They mentioned that sometimes they struggled to structure their writing in a logical and flowing manner, which resulted in disjointed or fragmented ideas. They also noted a lack of appropriate vocabulary to express their thoughts, making it challenging for readers to follow their arguments or grasp the central message of their writing. Additionally, they faced the challenge of finding the ideal balance between being concise and providing enough details. Their tendency to either be excessively specific or go off on pointless deviations sometimes took attention away from the core idea they were attempting to convey.

Interviewee 4 emphasized the challenges in listening comprehension, especially during lectures delivered by speakers with accents unfamiliar to her, such as Filipinos and Indians. She noted that dealing with fast-paced speech, unfamiliar accents, and complex vocabulary adds layers of difficulty to her listening skills. The presence of background noise or distractions further impairs her ability to comprehend spoken language in academic settings. This interviewee also acknowledged struggling with a range of language skills, including writing, grammar, vocabulary, and organization, all of which affect her ability to understand lectures and take notes effectively.

The observations provided a comprehensive view of trainees' language use across macro-skills, revealing discrepancies between self-reported challenges and actual performance. While trainees felt relatively confident in their speaking and writing abilities, the

observations highlighted significant challenges in fluency, coherence, and structure. Similarly, difficulties in listening and reading comprehension were evident in practical contexts, indicating a need for targeted support in these areas. The insights from Interviewees 4, 6 and 8 reinforced the necessity for focused training to enhance their overall language proficiency, particularly in grammar and vocabulary, to better prepare them for academic and professional success in textile and apparel fashion technology.

#### 4.2.2. Trainees' Perception of Difficulty of Listening Sub-Skills

This subsection reports trainees' difficulty ratings of eleven listening sub-skills. The analysis comprises mean scores and standard deviations to identify the sub-skills that posed relatively greater challenges on average.

**Table 2.** Trainees' rating of the difficulties of listening sub-skills

Listening sub-skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Listening to Lecture to Take Notes	128	3	5	4.19	0.83
Listening to Foreigners	128	2	5	4.15	0.83
Listening to Presentations	128	2	5	4.11	0.83
Listening to Meetings	128	1	5	3.80	0.97
Listening to Instructions	128	1	5	3.55	1.42
Listening to Interview	128	1	5	3.23	1.37
Listening to Explanations	128	1	5	3.09	1.32
Listening to Class Discussions	128	1	5	3.09	1.32
Listening to Questions	128	1	5	3.02	1.37
Listening to Feedback	128	1	5	2.98	1.41
Listening to Advice	128	1	5	2.75	1.51

The analysis of textile trainees' ratings of listening sub-skills reveals clear patterns in the perceived difficulty of various tasks. Among the sub-skills, *listening to a lecture to take notes* emerged as the most difficult, with a mean difficulty score of 4.19. This reflects the significant struggle trainees face when trying to comprehend lecture content while simultaneously taking effective notes, a skill that is essential in academic environments. Following closely behind is *listening to foreigners*, with a mean score of 4.15, indicating that understanding speakers with different accents or unfamiliar speech patterns poses substantial difficulty for trainees. *Listening to Presentations* also ranks highly in difficulty, with a mean score of 4.11, suggesting that the structured nature of formal presentations requires a high level of attention and processing from the listeners.

Another moderately difficult sub-skill is *listening to meetings*, with a mean score of 3.80. This rating reflects the complexity of understanding discussions involving multiple participants and the dynamic flow of information in a meeting setting. *Listening to instructions*, with a mean score of 3.55, highlights the challenge of accurately understanding directives, which is particularly crucial in practical and vocational settings like textile training. These instructions often require precise comprehension to ensure that tasks are executed correctly.

The next group of sub-skills, including *listening to interviews* (mean 3.23), *listening to explanations* (mean 3.09), and *listening to class discussions* (mean 3.09), presents moderate difficulty. These tasks demand an

understanding of complex information and multiple viewpoints, which can be more informal and less predictable than structured presentations or lectures. For trainees, following discussions and interviews in real-time can be a challenge, particularly when it involves interpreting underlying meanings or responding to questions. Further down the scale, *listening to questions* (mean 3.02) presents difficulties in processing and responding to inquiries, especially in formal academic or professional settings. *Listening to feedback* (mean 2.98) and *listening to advice* (mean 2.75) are rated as relatively easier tasks, although they still require careful attention to interpret and act on the information provided. While these sub-skills are less complex than others, they are still essential in the context of learning and professional development.

The observation data indicated that while trainees rated their listening abilities with moderate confidence,

the practical application revealed significant challenges in various sub-skills. The insights from Interviewees 4 and 8 in section 4.2.1 reinforced the importance of addressing the difficulties trainees face in listening, particularly in diverse linguistic contexts and complex discussions. The observations emphasized the need for targeted interventions to improve listening comprehension, such as focusing on varied accents and developing strategies for effective note-taking during lectures and discussions.

#### 4.2.3. Trainees' Perception of Difficulty of Reading Sub-Skills

This part delivers trainees' difficulty rankings of ten reading sub-skills. The mean scores are analyzed to determine which sub-skills trainees found most or least challenging to comprehend.

**Table 3.** Trainees' rating of the difficulties of reading sub-skills

Reading sub-skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Reading Reports	128	3	5	4.25	0.77
Reading Manuals	128	2	5	4.13	0.75
Reading Books	128	3	5	4.03	0.82
Reading journals Articles	128	1	5	3.91	0.97
Reading Models	128	2	5	3.76	1.06
Reading Charts	128	2	5	3.73	0.95
Reading Instructions	128	1	5	3.72	1.14
Reading Notes/Handouts	128	1	5	3.69	1.05
Reading TTLM	128	1	5	3.61	1.18
Reading Letters	128	1	5	3.09	1.29

The analysis of the reading sub-skills in the textile and apparel fashion technology field provides insight into the difficulties trainees experience when engaging with various forms of written material. The table indicates that trainees find *reading reports* to be the most difficult sub-skill, with a mean score of 4.25 and a relatively low standard deviation (0.77), suggesting that trainees consistently rate this task as challenging. Reports often contain dense, technical information, which may explain why this sub-skill poses significant difficulty.

Following closely, *reading manuals* also ranks high in difficulty, with a mean score of 4.13. Manuals in technical fields typically contain complex instructions and specific terminology, which likely makes them challenging for trainees to fully understand and apply in their studies. Similarly, *reading books* is another sub-skill that trainees find challenging, with a mean score of 4.03.

This difficulty may stem from the need to engage with extensive text and comprehend detailed content.

Other sub-skills such as *reading journal articles* (3.91), *reading models* (3.76), and *reading charts* (3.73) are rated slightly lower in terms of difficulty. While journal articles often contain advanced and specialized content, models and charts involve interpreting visual data, which requires a combination of reading and analytical skills.

*Reading instructions* (3.72) and *reading notes/handouts* (3.69) are also moderately difficult for trainees. These tasks involve processing concise but crucial information, often under time pressure, which can be a challenge for those who are still developing their reading comprehension skills.

At the lower end of the difficulty spectrum, *reading TTLM* (Teaching Training and Learning Materials) and *reading letters* received mean scores of 3.61 and 3.09 respectively. Although these sub-skills are not perceived as overwhelmingly difficult, they still present some challenges, particularly when the materials involve technical or unfamiliar content.

#### 4.2.4. Trainees' Perception of Difficulty of Speaking Sub-skills

This subsection presents trainees' difficulty ratings for seven speaking sub-skills. The analysis of mean scores identifies the sub-skills that were relatively more challenging.

**Table 4.** Trainees' rating of the difficulties of speaking sub-skills

Speaking sub-skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Giving Presentations	128	3	5	4.24	0.75
Describing Diagrams/Charts	128	3	5	4.04	0.79
Participating in Discussions	128	3	5	3.94	0.84
Responding to Interviews	128	1	5	3.84	1.06
Asking Questions	128	1	5	3.27	1.33
Giving Instructions	128	1	5	3.33	1.45
Replying Questions	128	1	5	2.97	1.06

Table 4 shows the trainees' ratings of the difficulties of various speaking sub-skills. *Giving presentations* ranks as the most challenging, with a mean score of 4.24 and a relatively low standard deviation (0.75), indicating that trainees consistently find this task tough. This difficulty may arise from the need to organize ideas, articulate thoughts clearly, and speak confidently in front of an audience. Interviewee 13 reinforced this by stating:

*Um..., you know, presenting in front of classmates and instructors is, like, nerve-wracking. I often, ah..., struggle to find the right words, and, um..., keeping the audience engaged while explaining something technical, you know..., makes it even harder.*

This shows how presenting requires both technical and linguistic skills, making it a tough task for many trainees.

The second most difficult sub-skill is *describing diagrams and charts*, with a mean score of 4.04. This task involves interpreting and explaining visual data, which requires language proficiency and the ability to translate complex visuals into spoken words. Interviewee 3 said:

*Ah, well..., explaining diagrams is, um..., tricky because, you know..., I need to make sure everyone understands what I'm saying, but, um, I sometimes lack the vocabulary to, you know, describe the parts accurately.*

This illustrates the challenge of speaking about technical visual content in a clear and understandable manner.

*Participating in discussions* follows, with a mean score of 3.94. This sub-skill requires active listening, quick responses, and effectively communicating one's ideas. Discussions often involve back-and-forth exchanges, which some trainees find difficult. Interviewee 13 added, *"Well, um..., during group discussions, I, like, sometimes have good ideas but, ah..., I can't express them clearly, so, um..., I often stay quiet."* This highlights how limited language ability can prevent trainees from fully engaging in discussions, even when they have valuable input.

*Responding to interviews* also poses a challenge, with a mean score of 3.84. Interviews require quick thinking and immediate responses, often under pressure. Interviewee 3 shared that interviews were stressful because they had to answer immediately, and if they did not understand the question properly, it was difficult to give a good answer. This shows that both comprehension and articulation are challenging during interviews, especially when quick and clear responses are necessary.

The sub-skills of *asking questions* (3.27) and *giving instructions* (3.33) are less difficult but still present moderate challenges. Asking questions involves formulating clear and specific inquiries, which can be tricky when dealing with unfamiliar technical terms. Similarly, giving instructions requires precision in language, especially when explaining steps or processes. Both tasks need clarity and confidence in communication.

Finally, *replying to questions* is rated as the least difficult sub-skill, with a mean score of 2.97. However, the standard deviation (1.06) suggests variability in how trainees perceive this task. Some may find it easier to

respond to direct questions, while others struggle with providing clear and accurate answers depending on the context.

The observations confirmed the trainees' self-reported challenges across various speaking sub-skills. While trainees exhibited strengths in certain areas like *giving presentations, describing diagrams, and participating in discussion* they often faced significant hurdles related to confidence, elaboration, and clarity. The feedback from Interviewees 3 and 13 further emphasized the need for support in building confidence and refining communication strategies, particularly in high-pressure speaking situations. This comprehensive analysis of self-

reports and observed performance provides critical insights into the specific areas where trainees need targeted assistance to enhance their speaking skills in the context of textile and apparel fashion technology.

#### 4.2.5. Trainees' Perception of Difficulty of Writing Sub-skills

This final subsection presents trainees' difficulty assessments of eight writing sub-skills, analyzed through mean scores and standard deviations. The findings highlight the relative challenges associated with each sub-skill.

**Table 5.** Trainees' rating of the difficulties of writing sub-skills

Writing sub-skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Writing Reports	128	3	5	4.24	0.78
Writing project Proposals	128	2	5	4.16	0.78
Writing Assignment	128	2	5	4.06	0.89
Writing Essay	128	1	5	3.65	1.19
Doing writing Task/Exam	128	1	5	3.57	1.16
Making Notes	128	2	5	3.52	1.06
Writing Instruction	128	1	5	3.34	1.32
Writing Letters	128	1	5	3.27	1.31

The trainees' assessments of the difficulty of various writing sub-skills offer insightful information about their experiences.

The analysis of the writing sub-skills for textile and apparel fashion technology trainees highlights their perceived difficulties in various aspects of writing. The data indicates that *writing reports* is considered the most challenging sub-skill, with a mean score of 4.24 and a relatively low standard deviation (0.78), suggesting that most trainees find this task difficult. Writing reports involves not only organizing and presenting information clearly but also adhering to technical formats, which could explain its high difficulty rating. Interviewee 5 reflected on this, saying:

*Um..., writing reports is, like, a big challenge for me because, ah..., you need to be very clear and, you know, structure everything properly. It takes me a long time to, um..., make sure it's organized the right way.*

This shows that the complexity of report writing, with its need for clarity and proper structure, poses significant challenges for trainees.

The second most difficult sub-skill is *writing project proposals*, with a mean score of 4.16. Project proposals require persuasive language, technical detail, and clear organization, all of which can be daunting tasks for trainees. Interviewee 12 added:

*um..., writing project proposals, um..., is difficult because, like, you need to convince people, and, um..., I struggle with, ah, finding the right words to, you know, explain the project clearly.*

This response highlights the difficulties in articulating ideas convincingly while maintaining technical accuracy in proposal writing.

*Writing assignments* is another sub-skill that trainees find challenging, with a mean score of 4.06. Assignments often require critical thinking and synthesizing information, which may be difficult when trainees are unfamiliar with certain academic conventions. The task demands that they present their knowledge in a structured and coherent way, which many find hard to manage.

*Writing essays* follows, with a mean score of 3.65. Essays typically require argumentation, coherence, and adherence to formal writing conventions, which explains

the moderate level of difficulty trainees report. This task involves not only understanding the topic but also structuring ideas logically, which can be challenging in a second-language context.

The sub-skills of *doing writing tasks/exams* (3.57) and *making notes* (3.52) are rated as moderately difficult. Writing tasks in exams may cause anxiety due to time constraints, while making notes demands both summarization and synthesis skills. Interviewee 5 replied:

*Ah..., during exams, it's, um..., hard to organize my thoughts quickly, and I, you know..., feel rushed. It's, um..., stressful trying to write everything correctly in such a short time.*

This reflects the pressure trainees feel during exam writing tasks, contributing to the difficulty.

*Writing instructions* and *writing letters* are perceived as somewhat easier but still challenging, with mean scores of 3.34 and 3.27, respectively. Both sub-skills require clear, concise communication, particularly in professional or technical contexts, where miscommunication can lead to errors.

Observations aligned with trainees' self-reported difficulties, especially in writing reports and project proposals. Real-time performance mirrored these challenges, emphasizing the need for support in grammar, vocabulary, and structuring complex technical tasks, as reinforced by interview feedback. This combination of self-reports and observed performance offers a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by trainees in developing their writing skills in a technical training context.

## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate trainees' perceptions of English language difficulty within an Ethiopian technical program. The following discussion will contextualize key findings, relate them to prior research, present new insights, address limitations, and consider implications.

### 5.1 Trainees' Perceptions of Writing Difficulty

The finding that trainees rated writing as the most challenging aligns with past research indicating that non-native speakers face organizational, coherence, and grammatical hurdles in academic writing due to intricate conventions (Hyland, 2008; Hyland, 2013). This is further supported by findings that highlight the importance of strong writing and oral skills for garment and textile technology trainees, as effective written communication is crucial for tasks like reports, proposals, and documentation (Miftah, 2015; Kho et al., 2023).

In contrast, a study by Kachru (1992) found that cultural factors significantly influence writing styles, indicating that what is perceived as difficulty may also vary by cultural context. Language courses should focus on improving students' abilities to express ideas clearly, organize information, and use appropriate technical language through individualized instruction and differentiation strategies tailored to each student's proficiency and needs, ensuring maximum language development and engagement (Menon & Nedungadi, 2015; Miftah, 2015). Instructional scaffolds are recommended to build these writing abilities effectively (Kitajroonchai et al., 2022; and Rusinovci, 2015).

Variability in writing perceptions in this study could relate to individual factors such as confidence, prior experience, and language proficiency, as hypothesized by Illyin et al. (2019). Situated learning theory posits that mastery develops through authentic, context-embedded practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991); trainees with richer applied writing experiences may feel more competent. Bediako (2021) found that English for Specific Purposes courses boosted students' writing self-efficacy. Zeleke et al. (2023) stated that the language content used in the Federal TVET Institute does not meet the English language needs of trainees, indicating a lack of topical relevance in the existing teaching materials. This sentiment is echoed by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), who argue that English for Specific Purposes courses must align closely with learners' specific professional and academic needs. Targeted intervention is necessary, as Ethiopian technical and vocational training often neglects discipline-specific development. Customized support addressing organizational structures, technical terminology, and self-regulated learning strategies could optimize writing outcomes (MacArthur et al., 2008; Novriyani & Nurweni, 2018). Instructors must also consider students' cultural backgrounds and literacy experiences in their pedagogical approaches (Naddumba & Athiemoolam, 2022).

### 5.2 Difficulty of Trainees with Listening Sub-Skills

The challenges with note-taking align with research indicating that the cognitive load of verbatim transcription hinders comprehension for many trainees (Kobayashi, 2005; Piolat et al., 2005). Factors such as delivery speed, unfamiliar accents, and background noise exacerbate these difficulties (Kobayashi, 2005; Vandergrift, 2004). Another study found that lecturing styles significantly influence comprehension, noting that verbatim instructions and multitasking hinder inference skills (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020).

This theory suggests that lectures are socially constructed learning experiences; thus, active listening and note construction scaffold knowledge internalization (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Note-taking frameworks providing visual outlines and cue words could enhance trainees' abilities to selectively encode meaningful concepts over verbatim details (Pevery et al., 2007). Instructors adopting explicit instruction in effective note-taking strategies can support students according to socio-cognitive models (Zimmerman, 2008). This aligns with the findings of Haghverdi et al. (2010), who emphasize the need for strategic listening training to improve comprehension and retention among trainees. Adapting delivery methods and providing note-taking frameworks could help overcome these barriers.

### 5.3 Difficulty with Technical Reading Materials

Trainees' perceptions that reading manuals, reports, instructions, and models/diagrams are the most difficult aligns with findings indicating that technical reading demands stronger inference, critical analysis, and familiarity with specialized terminology compared to general materials (Chen, 2003). In contrast, research by Chan et al. (2019) suggests that integrating visual aids can significantly enhance comprehension of technical texts, a strategy that might alleviate some of the perceived difficulties noted by trainees. Readers from non-Western, collectivistic cultures typically struggle more with linear text organization, as they often prioritize individual interpretation over summarization (Bond, 1991; Kambara et al., 2023). Implementing close reading techniques that activate relevant schemata before comprehension attempts could aid in understanding (Duchak, 2014). Interactive readings incorporating visuals, discussions, and applied tasks may better support situated learning in this context (Ammanabrolu et al., 2021; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Instructors must acknowledge cultural learning style differences to ensure equitable access through flexible delivery methods (Naz et al., 2023).

### 5.4 Variability in Speaking Perceptions

The study's findings reveal that making oral presentations, describing diagrams/charts, and responding to interviews are perceived as the most difficult speaking sub-skills, showing high variability among trainees in their difficulty levels. Extensive research indicates that individual characteristics such as confidence, attitudes, and experience heavily influence self-perceived oral abilities (Andhara et al., 2018; Clément et al., 2003).

Interestingly, variability existed even for supposedly more objective tasks like presentations, underscoring the need for instructors to understand each learner's unique socio-cognitive factors shaping self-efficacy and performance (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013). This

supports the work of Saeed et al. (2022), who highlight the role of social interaction in developing speaking skills among learners. Establishing a supportive classroom environment where mistakes are accepted and incremental learning is celebrated may help boost confidence over time as competence increases (Voisin et al., 2023). Repeated opportunities to practice speaking in a range of authentic workplace simulation tasks empower students to develop robust self-regulation abilities and situated expertise (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Overall, Targeted language instruction tailored to students' needs and supported by customized mechanisms aligns with best practices for enhancing technical English proficiency. Ongoing analysis of emerging needs will ensure curricula and training remain adaptable and effective.

### 5.5 Integrating Macro-Skills

The data on macro-skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking, indicate a holistic view of language acquisition. The interconnectedness of these skills suggests that effective training should not isolate one skill from another. For example, enhancing listening skills through explicit instruction in effective note-taking and comprehension strategies can directly influence reading skills by fostering a deeper understanding of technical texts. Similarly, the development of writing skills, particularly in technical contexts, can benefit from integrating speaking and listening activities that allow trainees to practice and apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios. Research supports this integrated approach; for instance, Goh and Hu (2014) and Vandergrift (2004) emphasize the importance of integrating listening and speaking skills for language learners, indicating that proficiency in one area can enhance performance in another. Moreover, studies by Alzubi et al. (2024) suggest that collaborative learning strategies, such as peer teaching and group discussions, can significantly improve language proficiency across multiple skills, reinforcing the idea that social interaction is crucial in language learning.

The findings from this study align with the notion that trainees' self-perceptions of difficulty across these skills highlight the necessity for tailored instructional approaches that address individual learner needs, preferences, and backgrounds. This sentiment is echoed by Swain (2000), who posits that engaging in meaningful communicative activities fosters deeper cognitive processing and language acquisition. Incorporating task-based learning and collaborative activities can provide a supportive environment where trainees can practice language skills interactively. This perspective aligns with research by Newton and Nation (2020), which emphasizes the effectiveness of integrated language skills training for enhancing overall proficiency.

Moreover, integrating grammar and vocabulary instruction with the macro-skills can further enhance the effectiveness of the language program. Studies by Kürüm (2016), McCarthy (1990) and Thornbury (2005) emphasize the importance of context in vocabulary acquisition, suggesting that language is best learned in situational contexts where trainees can actively engage with vocabulary in meaningful ways. Drawing from insights gained through observational data and trainee feedback, educators have the opportunity to design and implement pedagogical strategies that are more effective and responsive to learners' needs. These strategies can encourage active participation, enhance motivation, and foster a greater sense of ownership and responsibility in students for their own learning processes, ultimately leading to deeper engagement and better outcomes.

## 6. Conclusions

This study explored the self-perceived English language proficiency and difficulties faced by trainees at the FDRE Technical and Vocational Training Institute, focusing on key skills critical for academic and professional success. The findings indicate that writing and speaking are the most challenging areas, with specific difficulties in organizing ideas, maintaining coherence, and effectively articulating technical concepts during reports, proposals, presentations, and discussions. Listening also emerged as a significant obstacle, particularly in understanding unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, and effectively taking notes during lectures. Reading challenges, such as comprehending technical manuals, reports, and diagrams, highlight the need for targeted reading strategies to enhance comprehension and practical application. While grammar and vocabulary were perceived as less challenging, their contextual use in writing and speaking tasks still presents notable difficulties, underscoring the importance of practical, task-oriented training.

This study contributes novel insights into the specific linguistic barriers encountered in the Ethiopian TVET context, an area that has received limited attention in previous research. The findings emphasize the need for a learner-centered curriculum that integrates macro-skills through interactive, task-based methods. Such approaches, coupled with collaborative learning opportunities and real-world language applications, can significantly improve trainees' language proficiency and self-confidence, better preparing them for the workforce and global career demands. Future research should investigate the long-term impacts of integrated language instruction on the academic and professional success of TVET trainees. Studies could also expand to explore the English language needs across diverse vocational disciplines, enabling the design of more comprehensive, industry-specific instructional resources. Additionally,

examining the role of technology-enhanced language learning tools in addressing these challenges could offer valuable insights for modernized and scalable training approaches.

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