

From Yemen to A Global Environment: The International Business English Role in Enhancing Workforce and Trade

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500583>

Received: 09 May 2026; Accepted: 14 May 2026; Published: 08 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the critical role of International Business English (IBE) proficiency as a key enabler of workforce development and international trade enhancement in the Republic of Yemen. Despite its strategic geographical location and economic potential, Yemen continues to face serious challenges, including high unemployment rates and limited integration into global markets. This study argues that inadequate IBE skills among Yemeni professionals constitute a significant non-tariff barrier to trade and hinder effective human capital development. Adopting a descriptive quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 150 Yemeni professionals working in trade-related sectors, including import and export firms, financial services, and supply chain and logistics organizations. Data analysis relied on descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages using SPSS software, to examine respondents' self-reported English proficiency levels, workplace language needs, perceived challenges, and preferred strategies for improving Business English skills. The findings reveal that while English is widely perceived as essential for employability, career advancement, and international trade engagement, most respondents report only moderate levels of proficiency. Limited opportunities for workplace practice and insufficient exposure to specialized Business English training emerged as major challenges. Respondents emphasized speaking, business writing, and knowledge of commercial terminology as priority skills and strongly favored intensive training programs and workplace-based learning initiatives. The study concludes that strategic investment in International Business English education, integrated with vocational training and tailored to sector-specific needs is not merely an educational enhancement but an economic necessity for Yemen. It recommends coordinated public-private initiatives to develop targeted Business English training programs capable of strengthening workforce competitiveness and supporting Yemen's integration into the global economy.

Keywords: Business English, Yemen, Human Capital Development, International Trade, Labor Market, Economic Development, Language Policy, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Yemen, located at a strategic crossroads connecting the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, has historically served as an important center of trade and commercial exchange. However, Yemen today faces profound socio-economic challenges, exacerbated by prolonged conflict, which have significantly constrained its economic development and integration into the global economy. In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to participate effectively in international business has become essential to national economic sustainability and growth. Such participation is strongly mediated by language, with English having emerged as the dominant lingua franca of global trade, finance, and diplomacy.

International Business English (IBE) extends beyond general English proficiency. It encompasses specialized vocabulary, professional communication practices, and intercultural competence required for effective performance in international business contexts, including negotiations, professional correspondence, marketing activities, and contract administration. In developing and conflict-affected countries such as Yemen, an IBE-competent workforce represents a critical component of human capital, with direct implications for attracting foreign investment, expanding exports of goods and services, and integrating into global value chains.

This study argues that developing International Business English competence among Yemeni professionals constitutes a key pathway for enhancing workforce competitiveness and supporting economic recovery. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic proficiency as an abstract skill, the study emphasizes the practical role of IBE in addressing labor market needs and facilitating international trade engagement. Accordingly, it examines current levels of IBE proficiency among Yemeni professionals, identifies gaps between existing skills and workplace demands, and explores practical strategies for improving Business English competence in alignment with sector-specific and national economic priorities.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Yemen's strategic geographic location and its historical role in regional and international trade, its current participation in the global economy remains limited. A growing body of research in applied linguistics and international business indicates that English proficiency—particularly in its specialized form as International Business English (IBE)—is a critical component of human capital development and global economic integration (Graddol, 2006; Nickerson, 2013; Neeley, 2012). However, in Yemen, this dimension remains underdeveloped and insufficiently addressed within both higher education and vocational training systems.

Existing evidence suggests that language competence functions not merely as a communicative tool but as an economic resource that directly influences employability, productivity, and trade performance (Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 2014; Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017). In contexts where English serves as a lingua franca of international business, limited proficiency can create what scholars describe as a “linguistic barrier to market access”, effectively operating as a non-tariff constraint on trade (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013).

Within the Yemeni context, preliminary findings from the current study indicate that professionals engaged in trade-related sectors report only moderate levels of Business English proficiency, alongside limited opportunities for workplace practice and insufficient exposure to specialized training. This situation reflects a broader structural gap between educational outputs and labor market demands, a mismatch widely documented in developing economies (World Bank, 2020; OECD, 2019).

The problem manifests at two interrelated levels:

First, at the labor market level, insufficient IBE competence restricts Yemeni professionals' ability to compete for positions that require interaction with international partners. This contributes to underemployment among graduates and increases reliance on expatriate expertise, thereby limiting the development of local human capital (Neeley, 2012; Harzing & Pudelko, 2013).

Second, at the trade and economic level, inadequate Business English proficiency impedes effective communication in key business functions such as negotiation, contract drafting, and cross-border coordination. Research has shown that communication failures in international business contexts can lead to transaction inefficiencies, reduced trust, and missed commercial opportunities (Tenzer et al., 2017; Charles, 2007). In this sense, language deficiency acts as a hidden but significant barrier to trade competitiveness.

The core problem, therefore, is not merely a general lack of English proficiency, but rather the absence of a systematic, context-sensitive framework for developing International Business English competencies aligned with sector-specific workforce needs and international trade requirements. Current educational programs in Yemen largely emphasize general English, with limited attention to functional, occupational, and domain-specific language use, resulting in graduates who are linguistically underprepared for real-world business environments.

This gap has significant implications: it weakens workforce competitiveness, constrains private sector growth, and limits Yemen's capacity to integrate into global value chains. Consequently, there is a pressing need to empirically investigate the nature of this skills gap and to identify targeted, evidence-based strategies for enhancing Business English competence as a driver of economic development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of International Business English proficiency among Yemeni professionals engaged in trade-related activities.
2. To identify the specific International Business English skills (e.g., email communication, report writing, presentations, and negotiation) that are most relevant to professional success in Yemen.
3. To identify effective strategies for improving Business English skills among the Yemeni workforce in order to enhance employability and support international trade performance.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of International Business English proficiency among Yemeni professionals working in trade-related fields?
2. Which International Business English skills are most and least developed among these professionals?
3. How can Business English skills among the Yemeni workforce be improved?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization and the internationalization of markets have positioned English, particularly International and Business English, as a central communicative resource for firms, workers, and policymakers seeking to expand trade, attract investment, and access global knowledge networks. Cross-country empirical studies indicate that shared or high levels of English proficiency reduce communication frictions and are positively associated with bilateral trade flows, export performance, and individual wage premiums. However, these effects are mediated by sectoral and institutional contexts.

At the same time, country-level and sector-specific studies highlight considerable heterogeneity in outcomes. The economic gains from English proficiency tend to be strongest in internationally oriented sectors such as information technology, finance, and business process outsourcing, where employers actively demand English skills, education systems emphasize communicative competence, and language policies are aligned with labor market needs. These global findings provide an important analytical framework for examining the Yemeni context. In Yemen, higher education and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs face structural constraints that limit graduates' employability in international markets. Nevertheless, targeted Business English and workplace-oriented ESP interventions have the potential to enhance workforce capabilities and strengthen trade linkages when aligned with sectoral strategies.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study draws primarily on **Human Capital Theory** (Becker, 1964), which posits that education and skill development enhance worker productivity and, consequently, national economic performance. Within this framework, International Business English competence can be conceptualized as a form of specialized human capital that improves employability, facilitates knowledge transfer, and reduces inefficiencies in international economic transactions. Equipping Yemeni professionals with Business English skills therefore contributes to higher-value employment opportunities and improved national competitiveness.

The study also incorporates insights from **Transaction Cost Economics** (Williamson, 1981), which emphasizes that effective communication reduces uncertainty, negotiation costs, and contractual misunderstandings in cross-border business. Given English's status as the lingua franca of global commerce, an adequate level of International Business English proficiency can mitigate language-related transaction costs that otherwise hinder international trade activities.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the framework is further informed by **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) theory** (Seidlhofer, 2011). ELF conceptualizes English not as a native-speaker norm but as a flexible and functional medium of intercultural communication. This perspective underscores that effective Business English

proficiency does not require native-like accuracy but rather intelligibility, appropriateness, and communicative effectiveness within professional contexts.

Conceptual Model Description

Based on these theoretical foundations, the conceptual framework proposes that International Business English competence—encompassing vocabulary knowledge, professional communication skills, and cultural awareness—directly influences workforce performance outcomes, such as negotiation effectiveness, report writing, and professional presentations. These performance outcomes, in turn, contribute to trade success and professional advancement. The relationship is moderated by sectoral demand, prior professional experience, and institutional support mechanisms.

Conceptual Model Description:

The framework posits that **IBE competence** (vocabulary, communication skills, cultural awareness) influences **workforce performance outcomes** (negotiations, reports, presentations), which in turn affect **trade success and professional advancement**, moderated by sectoral demand, prior experience, and institutional support.

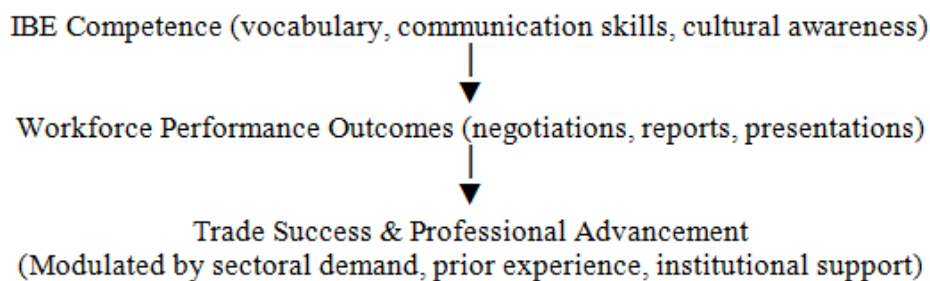


Figure 1. Conceptual Model (Descriptive) adapted from Hymes (1972); Canale and Swain (1980); Becker (1993); Rauch and Trindade (2002); Hofstede (2001).

Previous Studies

Empirical research provides strong support for the relationship between English proficiency and international economic performance. Using cross-country bilateral data, Ku and Zussman (2010) demonstrate that the use of English as a lingua franca increases trade flows between countries that do not share a native language by reducing transaction and communication costs. Their findings offer both theoretical and empirical justification for expecting Business English proficiency to facilitate international transactions and market access.

More recent evidence from a panel ARDL study covering 105 countries between 2011 and 2023 indicates that higher levels of English proficiency are associated with long-run increases in trade volumes, with notable regional variation. Stronger effects were observed in Asia and the Middle East, while weaker effects appeared in parts of Africa (Strange, Mustașcu, & Hegerty, 2025). This study is particularly relevant for policy analysis, as it highlights the conditional nature of language-related economic gains and emphasizes the importance of complementary institutional and sectoral strategies.

Policy-oriented literature further suggests that English proficiency can raise individual earnings, support foreign direct investment—particularly in service sectors such as business process outsourcing—and enable firms to move up global value chains. At the same time, these studies caution against equity concerns and stress the need to align language instruction with labor market demand (Cambridge Assessment & Cambridge English, 2018).

The link between economic performance and linguistic proficiency is well established in both economic and sociolinguistic research. Crystal (2003) identified English as a global lingua franca, a role that has only intensified in fields such as commerce and technology. Human Capital Theory further supports the notion that language skills constitute a form of capital that enhances productivity and income-generating potential (Becker, 1964).

Regional studies in the Arab world reinforce these conclusions. Belhiah and Elhami (2015) argue that English has evolved from a foreign language into a critical economic competency in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, supporting diversification and knowledge-based economic development. Although Yemen's economic structure differs from that of GCC countries, the underlying principle remains applicable. In the context of international trade, Grin (2001) demonstrates that language barriers increase transaction costs, while shared language significantly enhances efficiency in trade interactions.

Despite this extensive literature, a notable gap exists in the Yemeni context. Existing research on Yemen largely focuses on political and humanitarian issues (Alley, 2019), with limited attention to microeconomic factors such as workforce skills and language competence. This study addresses this gap by examining International Business English proficiency in relation to workforce performance and trade engagement in Yemen, thereby contributing empirical evidence to an underexplored area of development research.

At the institutional level, studies indicate that Business English instruction in Yemen remains largely theoretical. Research on the Business English Program at the Faculty of Languages, University of Aden, found that existing curricula insufficiently prepare students for practical business communication tasks, including negotiations, report writing, and professional correspondence (Exploring Students' Needs and Attitudes toward Business English Program Curriculum, n.d.). Teacher capacity has also been identified as a constraint. Aamer (2024) reports that English language instructors in Yemeni private institutes value continuing professional development but lack institutional support and structured training in ESP and Business English pedagogy. Similarly, Yahia and Ahmed (2025) found that undergraduate science students recognize the importance of English for academic and professional success, yet current instruction remains poorly aligned with real-world applications.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was designed as descriptive mixed-method research, using both quantitative and qualitative data. The mixed-methods design was chosen in order to provide an accurate picture of a given state of affairs as fully and carefully as possible (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p.15). Qualitative data were collected by using open ended questions and quantitative data were collected by using closed questions in the questionnaires.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 150 Yemeni professionals working in sectors related to international trade, including import and export, banking, logistics, and telecommunications. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who were directly relevant to the objectives of the study and capable of providing informed insights into the research topic.

Data Collection Instrument

Questionnaire

After reviewing the related literature, and examining studies carried out in the field, the researcher determined the content and items to be included in the online questionnaire. The questionnaire included closed-ended items addressing English proficiency levels, workplace usage, challenges, and skill priorities, as well as an open-ended question designed to capture respondents' suggested strategies for improving Business English skills. To ensure clarity and accessibility, the questionnaire was translated from English into Arabic. The initial form of the questionnaire was submitted for experts' opinions regarding its face and content validity and changes were made accordingly. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .89. Such a value can be considered an acceptable concordance (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered through closed ended questions in the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive analysis. (Frequencies and percentages). The Qualitative data gathered through open ended question

were analyzed using codes and themes. The researcher used the following weighted scale to indicate participants' responses according to Likert five-point scale:

Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several limitations.

Sample Scope:

Although the sample was purposively selected to target professionals engaged in trade-related activities, the relatively small sample size of 150 participants may not fully represent the Yemeni workforce across all governorates.

Self-Reported Data:

English proficiency levels were measured through self-reporting, which may be subject to bias, including overestimation or underestimation, compared to objective language assessment measures.

Cross-Sectional Design:

The study is cross-sectional in nature and provides a snapshot of perceptions at a single point in time. Longitudinal research would be required to assess the long-term effects of Business English training interventions on workforce performance and trade outcomes.

Generalizability:

The findings are context-specific to Yemen and should be generalized to other countries with caution, taking into account differences in economic structures, institutional frameworks, and labor market conditions.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the questionnaire administered to Yemeni professionals engaged in trade-related sectors. Findings are reported using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and are illustrated through bar charts. Results are organized according to demographic characteristics, English proficiency and use, perceived importance and challenges, and suggested strategies for improvement.

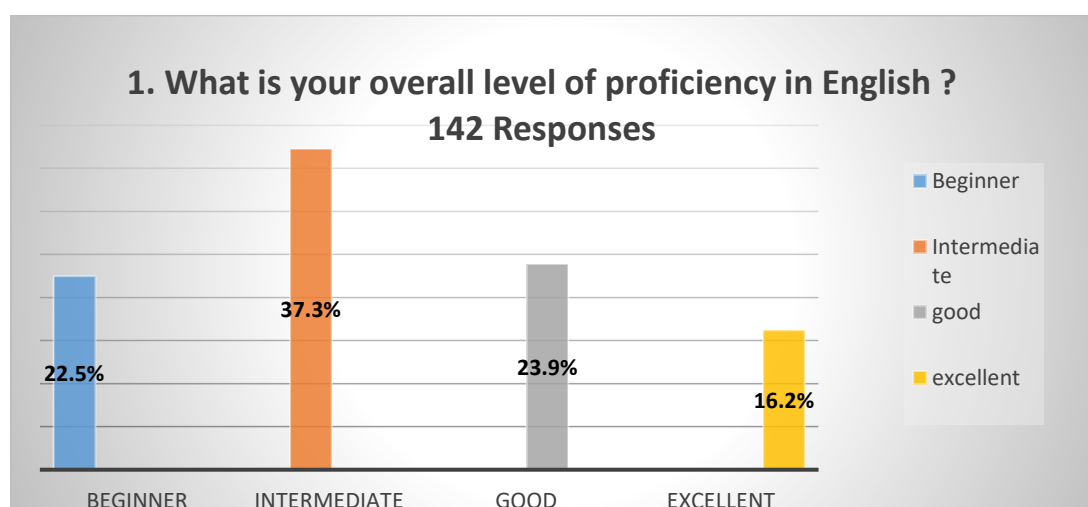


Figure 1: what is your overall level of proficiency in English?

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participants according to their English language proficiency levels. The findings reveal that the largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 37.3% (53 participants), reported an intermediate level of English proficiency. This indicates that most participants possess a moderate ability to use

English effectively in different situations. Participants with a good level of proficiency represented 23.9% (34 participants), reflecting a relatively strong command of the English language. In contrast, 22.5% (32 participants) were classified as beginners, suggesting that they have only basic knowledge and limited use of English. Meanwhile, the smallest proportion of respondents, 16.2% (23 participants), reported an excellent level of proficiency, representing the highest category of English competence among the participants.

Overall, the results suggest that the majority of participants possess moderate English language proficiency, with intermediate and good levels constituting the dominant categories. Only a limited number of respondents demonstrated excellent proficiency, while a considerable proportion remained at the beginner level.

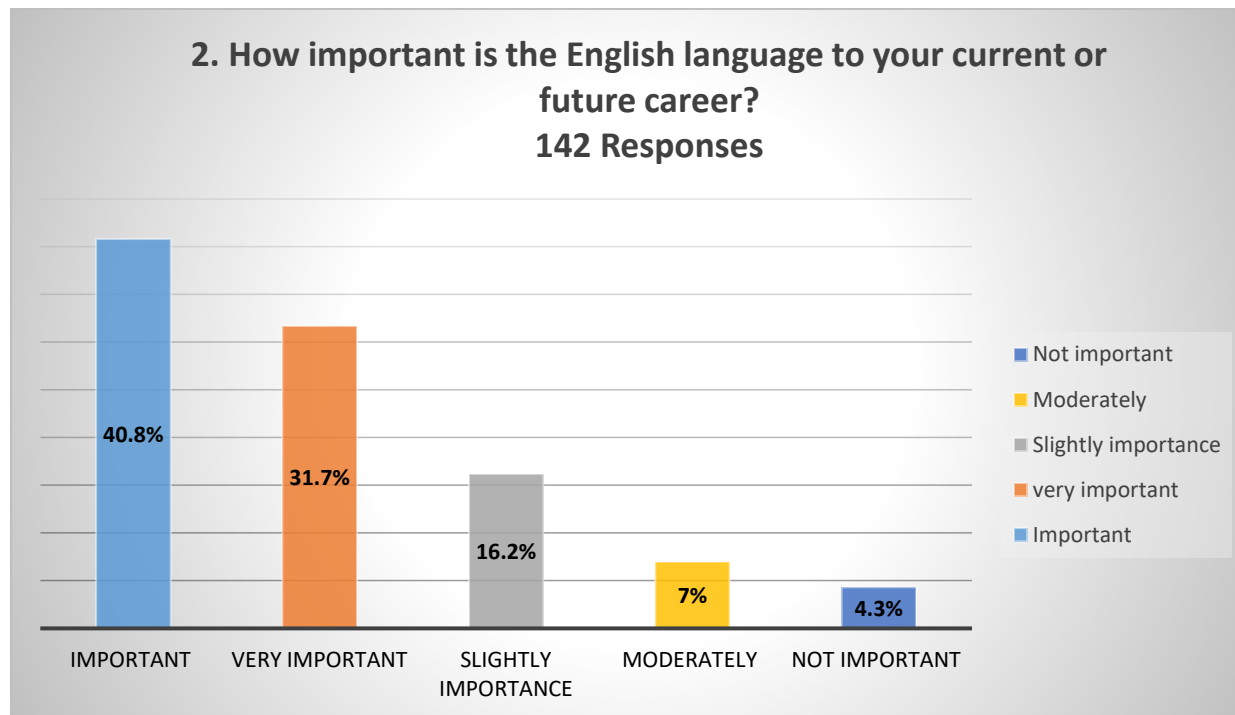


Figure 2: Analysis of the importance of English for your current or future career

Figure 2 shows that participants' perceptions regarding the importance of English for their current or future careers. The findings reveal that the largest proportion of respondents, representing 40.8% (58 participants), considered English important for their professional development. This indicates a strong awareness among participants of the significant role English plays in career advancement and workplace communication. Similarly, 31.7% (45 participants) rated English as very important, reflecting a substantial segment of respondents who view English proficiency as essential for achieving their future career goals and improving employment opportunities. In contrast, 16.2% (23 participants) perceived English as only slightly important, which may be attributed to their involvement in occupations or sectors that rely mainly on the local language. A smaller proportion of respondents, approximately 7–10%, considered English moderately important, suggesting some uncertainty regarding the extent to which English may influence their future careers. Meanwhile, only 4.3% (6 participants) reported that English was not important at all, indicating that very few participants believe their professional aspirations are unrelated to the use of English.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English is widely perceived as an important factor for career development. The majority of participants rated English as important or very important, whereas only a limited number of respondents viewed it as moderately important or of little importance.

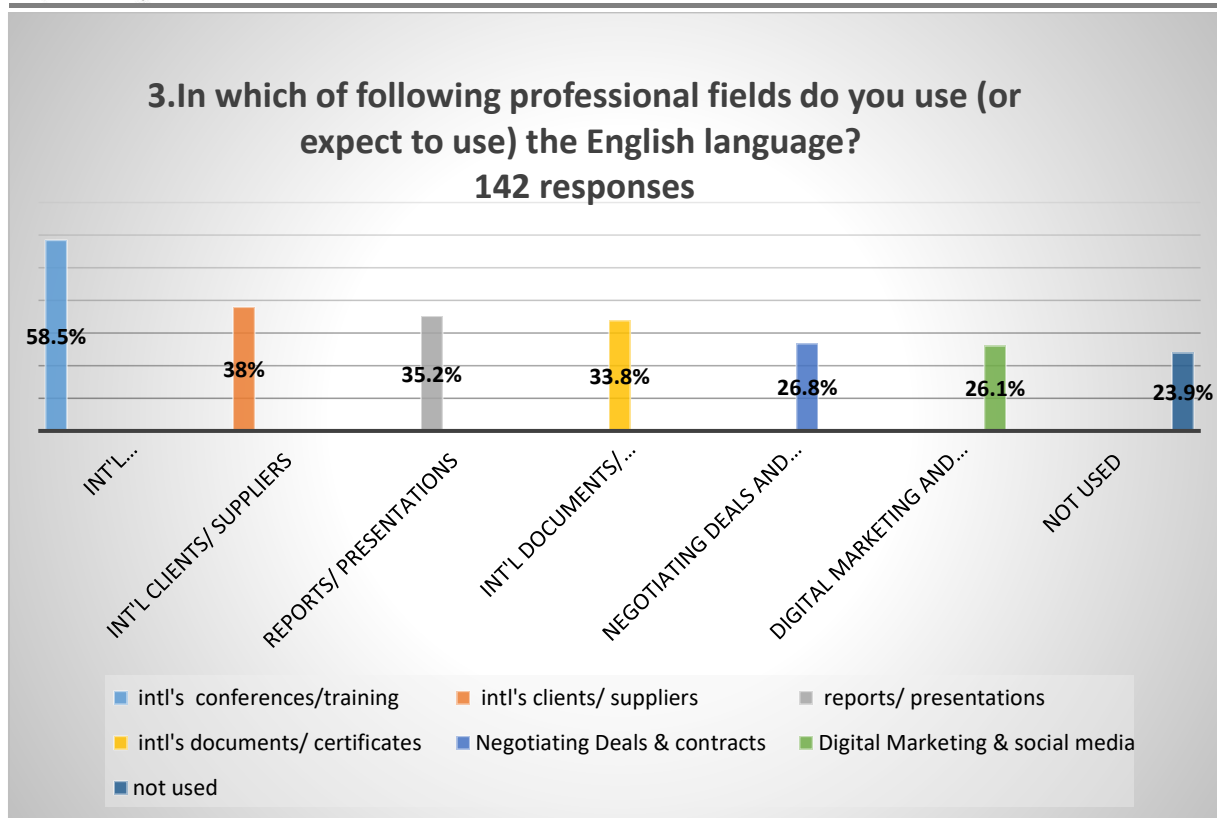


Figure 3: Analysis: In which of the following professional fields do you use (or expect to use) the English language?

Figure 3 reveals that the different professional contexts in which respondents use English in their work and career-related activities. The findings indicate that the most frequently reported use of English was participation in international conferences and training programs, representing 58.5% of the respondents. This suggests that English serves as a major medium for professional development, knowledge exchange, and access to international training opportunities. The results also show that English plays an important role in corporate communication and operational activities. Between 35.2% and 38% of respondents reported using English for communicating with international clients or suppliers and for preparing reports and presentations. These findings highlight the importance of English as an operational and professional communication tool in workplace environments. Furthermore, 33.8% of the participants (approximately 48 respondents) indicated that they use English to understand international documents, certificates, and technical materials. This demonstrates the strong connection between English proficiency and the ability to interpret global standards, professional documentation, and specialized information. In addition, between 26.1% and 26.8% of respondents reported using English in negotiation and digital marketing activities. This reflects the role of English in persuasive communication, marketing strategies, and brand development within professional contexts. On the other hand, 23.9% of the respondents (34 participants) stated that they do not use English in their professional activities. This may indicate that they work in sectors or environments where tasks are primarily local and do not require interaction in English.

Overall, the findings suggest that English is widely used across a variety of professional contexts, particularly in international training, workplace communication, and the interpretation of professional documents. However, a notable proportion of respondents still reported limited or no use of English in their work activities.

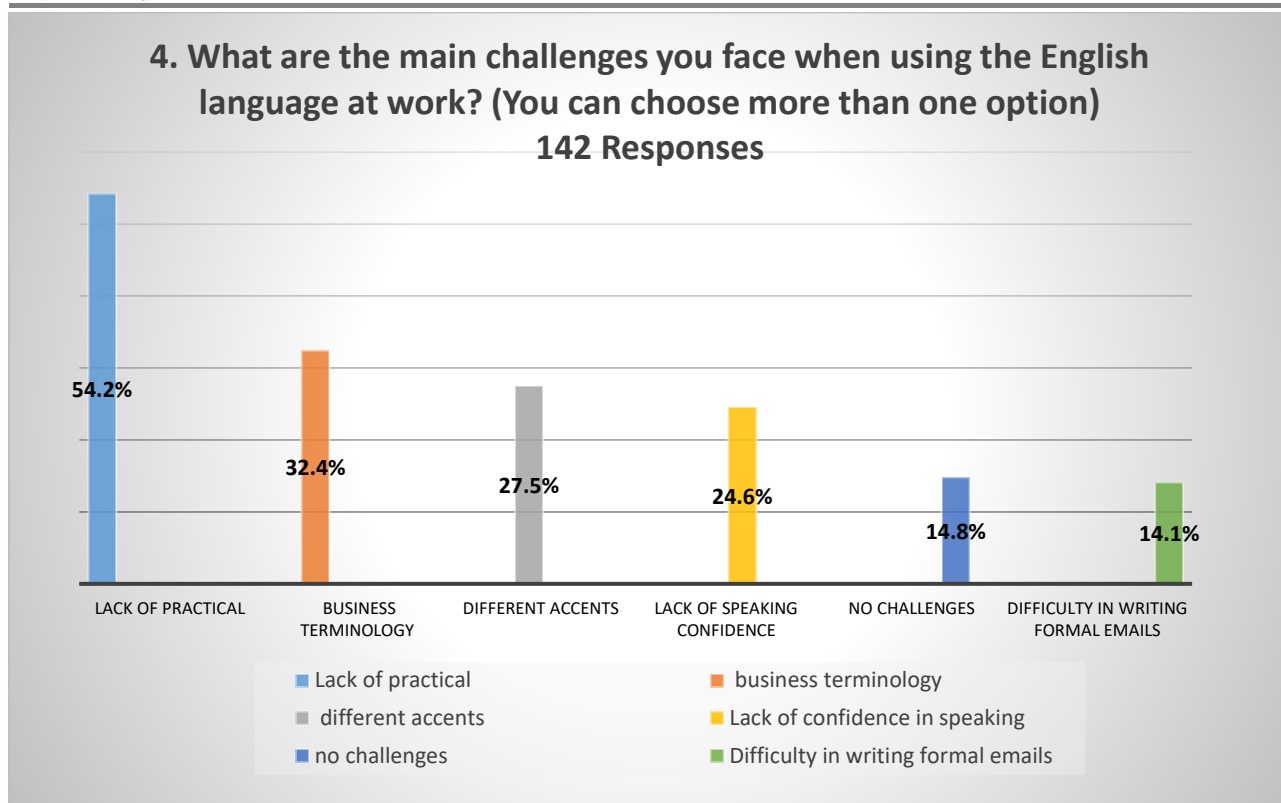


Figure 4: Analysis of the main challenges faced when using English at work

Figure 4 displays that the major challenges respondents face in using English within professional contexts. The findings reveal that the most significant challenge was the lack of opportunities for practical experience in workplace environments, reported by 54.2% of the respondents (77 participants). This suggests a gap between the theoretical learning of English and its actual application in real professional settings. Another major challenge identified was weakness in specialized business terminology, reported by 32.4% of the respondents (46 participants). This finding highlights the participants' need for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly terminology related to business and professional communication. Although some participants may possess general English proficiency, they may still face difficulties in understanding and using specialized vocabulary required in their fields of work. Additionally, 27.5% of the respondents (39 participants) indicated difficulty in understanding different English dialects and accents. This challenge reflects issues related to listening comprehension and auditory perception in increasingly globalized and multicultural communication environments. The results further show that 24.6% of the participants (35 respondents) lacked confidence in speaking English. This represents a psycholinguistic challenge, as some individuals may have sufficient language knowledge but hesitate to communicate due to fear of making mistakes in front of colleagues or clients. A smaller proportion of respondents, 14.1% (20 participants), reported difficulties in writing formal emails and professional correspondence. Although this was the least frequently reported challenge, it still indicates limitations in academic and professional writing skills.

Finally, 14.8% of the respondents (21 participants) stated that they did not face any challenges in using English. This group may consist of individuals with relatively high English proficiency or those working in environments well suited to their language abilities. Such individuals could potentially serve as mentors or language support resources for their colleagues in professional organizations.

Overall, the findings suggest that practical language use, specialized terminology, listening comprehension, and speaking confidence constitute the main challenges faced by respondents in professional English communication.

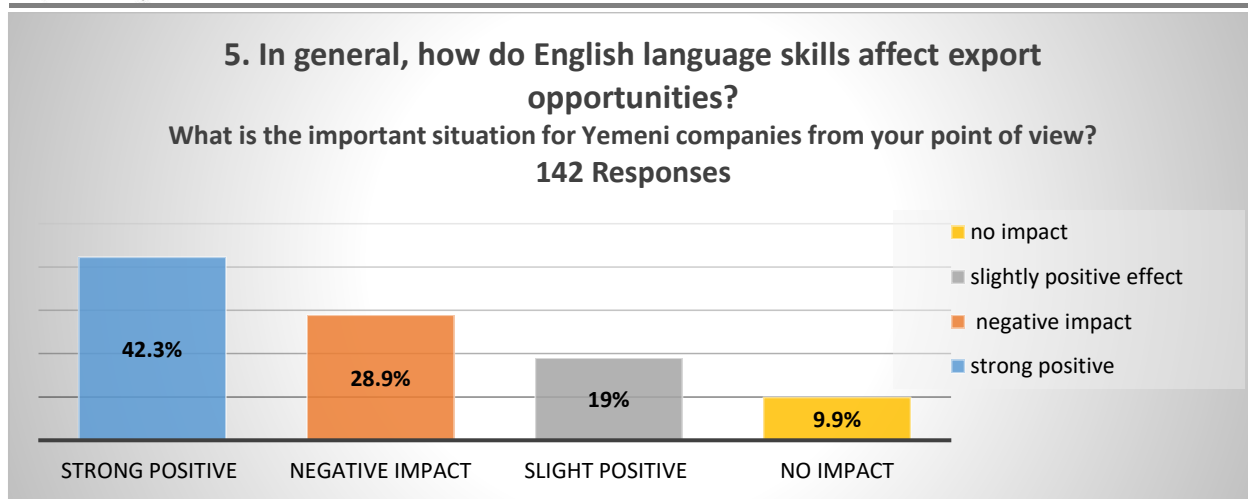


Figure 5: Analysis of the impact of English on corporate competitiveness

Figure 5 reveals that respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of English proficiency on corporate competitiveness. The findings reveal that the largest proportion of respondents, representing 42.3% (60 participants), believed that English has a positive and significant impact on corporate competitiveness, as it greatly increases business opportunities. This result reflects a dominant strategic perception that English functions as a key economic enabler for Yemeni companies seeking to compete and expand in international markets. In contrast, 28.9% of the respondents (41 participants) indicated that weak English proficiency can have a negative impact by reducing business opportunities. This finding demonstrates an awareness of the risks associated with linguistic isolation, where inadequate language skills may prevent companies from effectively accessing global markets, establishing international partnerships, or benefiting from available commercial opportunities. Furthermore, 19% of the respondents (27 participants) reported that English has a positive but limited effect, as it only slightly increases business opportunities. This perspective suggests a more pragmatic view in which English is considered an important professional tool, although not the sole determinant of commercial success or organizational competitiveness. Meanwhile, only 9.9% of the participants (14 respondents) believed that English has a negligible impact on corporate competitiveness. This small percentage may represent organizations that primarily operate within local or regional Arabic-speaking markets or depend on intermediaries and local agents to manage external communication with international partners.

Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of respondents perceive English as an important factor influencing corporate competitiveness and access to international opportunities. However, perceptions vary regarding the degree of its impact, ranging from highly significant to relatively limited depending on the nature of the business environment and market orienta

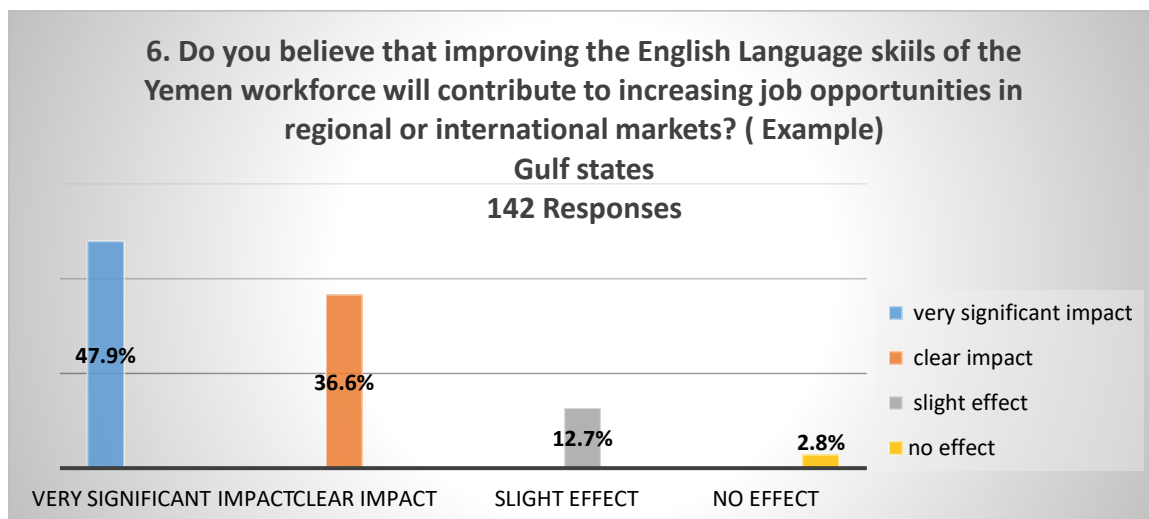


Figure 6: Analysis of workforce competitiveness in foreign markets.

Figure 6 shows that respondents' perceptions of the role of English proficiency in enhancing workforce competitiveness in foreign markets. The findings reveal that the largest proportion of respondents, representing 47.9% (68 participants), believed that English provides a very large competitive advantage for Yemeni workers in international labor markets. This reflects the prevailing perception that English functions as a "professional passport" that facilitates access to global employment opportunities and strengthens workers' competitiveness abroad.

Similarly, 36.6% of the respondents (52 participants) indicated that English proficiency has a clear impact on employability. This finding demonstrates a strong awareness that improving English language skills enhances employment prospects and increases individuals' ability to compete effectively in both regional and international job markets. In contrast, 12.7% of the participants (18 respondents) believed that English may have only a minor effect on workforce competitiveness. This perspective may reflect the view that the importance of English varies according to professional sectors, with some occupations relying more heavily on technical expertise or practical experience than on language proficiency. Meanwhile, only 2.8% of the respondents (4 participants) stated that English does not significantly influence job opportunities. This very small percentage suggests that a limited number of participants perceive other factors, such as work experience, qualifications, or specialization, as more important determinants of employability than language skills.

Overall, the findings indicate a strong perceived relationship between English proficiency and employability in foreign labor markets. The majority of respondents agreed that improving English skills has either a clear or highly significant effect on job opportunities, while only a small proportion considered its impact to be limited or negligible.

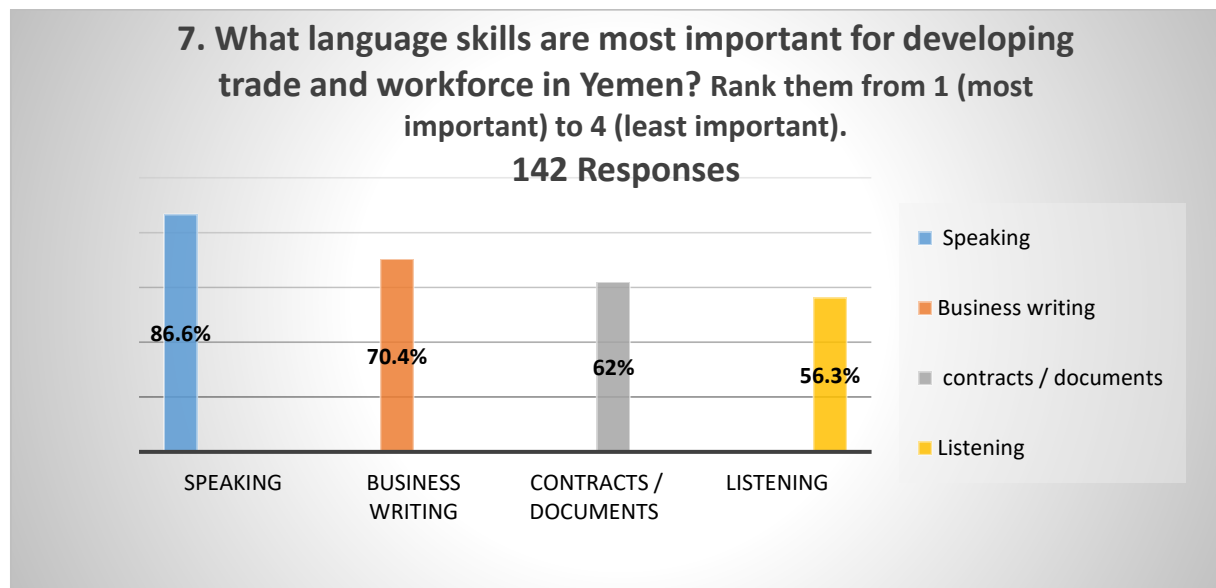


Figure 7: Analysis of language skills priorities in the Yemeni labor market

Figure 7 displays that respondents' perceptions of the most important English language skills required for workforce and trade development. The findings reveal that speaking, oral communication, and negotiation skills were identified as the highest priority by 86.6% of the respondents (123 participants). This strong emphasis reflects a clear understanding that international trade and business interactions fundamentally rely on effective communication and relationship-building skills. Business writing skills, including writing emails and reports, were ranked as the second most important skill by 70.4% of the respondents (100 participants). This finding highlights the significance of professional correspondence and documentation in maintaining business operations, ensuring effective communication, and supporting organizational continuity.

In addition, 62% of the respondents (88 participants) identified understanding contracts, official documents, and legal texts as an essential English skill. This result demonstrates the importance of analytical reading and comprehension skills in professional contexts, particularly for ensuring legal accuracy, technical understanding, and protection in international business transactions. Furthermore, 56.3% of the participants (80 respondents)

considered listening comprehension and understanding different English dialects and accents to be important skills. Although ranked fourth, this finding underscores the importance of accurate listening and interpretation in global communication environments. Respondents appear to recognize that successful communication depends not only on speaking ability but also on accurately understanding international partners from diverse linguistic backgrounds and accents.

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents consider communication-oriented English skills to be highly important for workforce competitiveness and trade development. Speaking and oral communication skills were viewed as the most critical, followed by business writing, understanding legal and official documents, and listening comprehension skills.

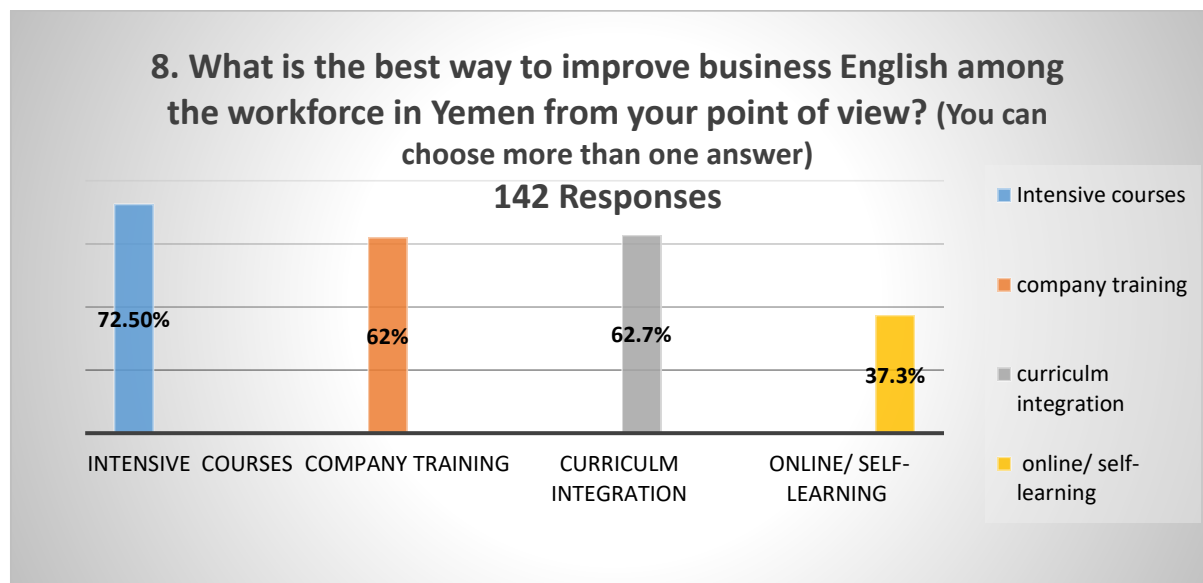


Figure 8 displays that respondents' perceptions regarding the most effective methods for developing English language skills, particularly in business and professional contexts. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents, representing 72.5% (103 participants), preferred intensive and specialized training courses in the field of Business English. This result suggests that participants favor practical, focused, and fast-track approaches to language development that directly address their professional needs. The second most preferred method was company-based training programs, supported by 62.7% of the respondents (89 participants). This finding highlights the perceived importance of workplace training and indicates that employees prefer language learning opportunities that are directly connected to their job responsibilities and professional environments. Similarly, 62% of the respondents (88 participants) emphasized the importance of integrating English into university curricula. This high percentage reflects participants' awareness of the need for structural and educational reform, particularly in aligning academic programs with labor market demands and preparing graduates with the language skills required for professional and international communication. In addition, 37.3% of the participants (53 respondents) reported that online platforms and self-learning methods could contribute to improving English language skills. Although this approach was less preferred compared to formal training programs, it still indicates an increasing orientation toward independent and continuous learning through digital resources and online educational platforms.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that respondents strongly support practical and professionally oriented approaches to developing Business English skills. Intensive specialized courses were viewed as the most effective strategy, followed by company-based training and the integration of English into formal educational curricula, while online and self-directed learning were also recognized as valuable supplementary approaches.

Analysis of Open-Ended Responses on Improving Business English Skills

Analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses revealed additional insights into proposed strategies for improving Business English skills. Respondents emphasized the introduction of English language education

from early childhood, particularly at the kindergarten and primary school levels. They also highlighted the importance of intensive workforce training programs, including government-supported initiatives.

Further suggestions included recruiting native-speaker or foreign English instructors, using modern technologies such as artificial intelligence-based language learning platforms, and encouraging continuous professional development. International exposure through scholarships, cultural exchange programs, and participation in international business conferences was also frequently mentioned. In addition, respondents recommended specialized training in international commercial and legal terminology, the establishment of digital platforms to market Yemeni products globally, and the adoption of English as a medium of instruction across university disciplines.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of International Business English (IBE) in enhancing workforce capability and international trade engagement in Yemen, with particular attention to proficiency levels, skill priorities, workplace challenges, and improvement strategies. The discussion below interprets the findings in relation to the research questions and existing literature.

The results indicate that most Yemeni professionals possess moderate levels of English proficiency, with relatively few reporting advanced competence. This finding is notable given the high educational attainment and extensive professional experience reported by the majority of respondents. It suggests that formal education alone has not translated into functional Business English skills, particularly those required for international professional contexts. This observation is consistent with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which emphasizes that the economic value of education depends not merely on years of schooling but on the relevance and applicability of acquired skills.

Despite moderate proficiency levels, respondents overwhelmingly perceived English as essential for career development and employability. This strong perception aligns with global and regional studies demonstrating the growing importance of English as a prerequisite for labor market participation and professional advancement, especially in trade-related and internationally oriented sectors. The perceived link between English proficiency and job opportunities reflects respondents' awareness of labor market realities, even when their own skill levels may be insufficient to fully capitalize on these opportunities.

Findings related to the use of English in professional contexts reveal that English is most frequently employed in international conferences, training programs, and interactions with foreign partners. However, a substantial proportion of respondents reported limited or no use of English in their daily work. This uneven usage suggests structural and institutional constraints within workplaces, particularly in public sector and locally oriented roles, where opportunities to practice English may be limited. Such constraints may contribute to skill stagnation or attrition, reinforcing the moderate proficiency levels observed.

The challenges identified by respondents further illuminate this issue. The most frequently reported barrier was the lack of opportunities to practice English in the workplace, followed by limited knowledge of specialized business terminology and difficulty understanding different accents. These challenges highlight a gap between general English education and the specific communicative demands of international business environments. Similar concerns have been raised in previous studies on ESP and Business English instruction, which emphasize the need for context-specific and practice-oriented language training.

With regard to international trade, most respondents perceived English proficiency as having a positive impact on export and import activities. Although perceptions varied, the overall trend supports findings from transaction cost economics, which posit that effective communication reduces uncertainty, negotiation costs, and misunderstandings in cross-border business. In this sense, English proficiency functions not merely as a linguistic skill but as an enabling mechanism for economic interaction.

The prioritization of speaking and business writing skills reflects respondents' recognition of the importance of practical communication abilities in professional and trade-related contexts. These findings align with the

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective, which emphasizes intelligibility, functionality, and communicative effectiveness over native-like accuracy. Respondents' preferences suggest that training programs should focus on real-world communicative tasks rather than abstract language knowledge.

Finally, the open-ended responses provide valuable insight into how respondents believe Business English skills can be improved. Suggested strategies—including early introduction of English education, intensive workforce training, use of technology and artificial intelligence, international exposure, and integration of English into higher education—demonstrate a strong consensus on the need for a comprehensive, multi-level approach. These qualitative findings complement the quantitative results and reinforce the applied, solution-oriented focus of the study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study examined the role of International Business English in workforce development and international trade engagement in Yemen. The findings demonstrate that while English is widely recognized as a critical skill for employability, professional advancement, and trade participation, most Yemeni professionals report only moderate levels of proficiency. Structural constraints, limited workplace practice, and insufficient exposure to specialized Business English training continue to hinder effective skill development.

The study also reveals a strong alignment between respondents' perceptions, reported challenges, and proposed solutions. English proficiency is not viewed merely as an educational asset but as a strategic economic tool essential for workforce competitiveness and international integration. These findings underscore the importance of shifting from general language instruction toward practical, context-sensitive Business English development aligned with labor market and trade demands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. English instruction should be introduced and strengthened from early childhood education, particularly at the kindergarten and primary school levels, to establish strong foundational skills.
2. Intensive and specialized Business English training programs should be developed for the workforce, with particular attention to speaking, business writing, and commercial terminology. Government-supported and subsidized programs can help ensure wider access.
3. English should be increasingly used as a medium of instruction across university disciplines to enhance graduates' functional language competence and readiness for the global labor market.
4. Modern technologies, including online platforms and artificial intelligence-based language learning tools, should be incorporated into English training to compensate for limited workplace practice opportunities.
5. Scholarship programs, cultural exchange initiatives, and participation in international business conferences should be encouraged to enhance both linguistic and intercultural competence.
6. Policymakers, educational institutions, and private sector organizations should collaborate to design standardized, industry-relevant Business English curricula and certification programs aligned with national workforce and trade development strategies.

Implementing these recommendations can contribute to strengthening human capital, improving workforce competitiveness, and supporting Yemen's gradual integration into the global economy.

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