



Studying English Among Economics Students in the Context of Global Cross-Cultural Communication

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Article History:

Received: 11-04-2025

Revision: 23-05-2025

Accepted: 30-05-2025

Publication: 11-07-2025

Cite this article as:

Liu, Z., Alzhanova, A., Smailova, A., Pavlovskaya, O., & Sakhno, O. (2025). Studying English among Economics Students in the Context of Global Cross-Cultural Communication. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 25(2), 250-265. doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i2.1141

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Abstract: The primary objective of any Business English course is to equip learners with the communicative competence required for professional environments. Accordingly, this study aimed to design and evaluate a technology-enhanced educational intervention to improve Business English proficiency among undergraduate economics students. Employing an action research methodology, the study was supported by post-tests, student surveys, and descriptive statistical analysis with qualitative contextual interpretation. The sample comprised 150 students from a university in China, divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group participated in a year-long instructional program that integrated the CNBC Business News and Finance app and Business English Pod into the curriculum. Post-intervention results revealed significant improvements across all assessed language skills, with the most notable gains in writing, reading, and speaking. Statistical analysis confirmed that the differences between the experimental and control groups were highly significant ($p < 0.01$). Survey data further indicated strong student engagement and increased confidence in using Business English for professional purposes. These findings underscore the pedagogical value of incorporating authentic business content and digital tools to enhance ESP instruction and prepare students for communication in globalized economic contexts.

Keywords: Business English; Cross-Cultural Communication, Educational Applications, English for Specific Purposes, Global Business Communication, Modern Technologies

1. Introduction

As foreign language proficiency gains increasing importance in professional settings, the ability to communicate effectively in multiple languages has become an essential component of the training of future economists. English, in particular, has emerged as the global lingua franca, serving as a medium for exchanging economic ideas, facilitating international cooperation, and enabling transnational business interactions. Proficiency in English enables graduates to communicate with colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds, accurately interpret economic terminology, and conduct business negotiations, thereby enhancing their employability and facilitating full integration into the global labor market. Moreover, professionals fluent in English and competent in additional foreign languages are increasingly sought after in a competitive job market (Thi Ngu et al., 2021).

Therefore, the development of effective pedagogical methods and strategies for cultivating foreign language skills among economics students remains a critical concern. This growing demand has underscored the significance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), prompting many higher education institutions to embed ESP courses into their curricula (Barus & Simanjuntak, 2020). Without tailored language instruction that addresses professional contexts, incorporating domain-specific discourse, genre conventions, and technical vocabulary, students may struggle to reach their full professional potential across various socio-economic sectors.

ESP constitutes a specialized branch of English language teaching, designed to meet the specific communicative needs of learners within their respective disciplines or professions. This approach is grounded in a thorough analysis of learner needs and is structured to align with the communicative norms and expectations of a given field, whether it involves drafting legal documents, conducting scientific reporting, or participating in business negotiations (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020). Consequently, ESP instruction must consider both individual learner profiles and the distinctive characteristics of the professional domain it serves.

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Within the ESP framework, Business English plays a critical role in preparing learners for communicative tasks in professional environments, such as written correspondence, meetings, and negotiations (Roshid et al., 2022). To fulfill this goal, instructors adopt a variety of instructional strategies, including the analysis of business texts, writing formal documents, engaging in oral communication scenarios, and interpreting marketing materials. Although Business English shares the core principles of ESP, focusing on language use within specific contexts, it is distinct in that it encompasses both technical and general communicative registers (Sasabone & Jubhari, 2021; Conrad, 2019).

The evolution of educational technologies has introduced new opportunities in Business English instruction. Globalization, coupled with the proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICT) and internet-based learning, has expanded access to language education through online platforms. However, language-based online learning differs fundamentally from content instruction delivered in a learner's native language (Branzila, 2020). It often requires learners to operate autonomously, with reduced direct guidance from instructors, thereby altering the traditional pedagogical dynamic.

Moreover, the integration of multimedia tools, such as videos, podcasts, and interactive applications, has been shown to enhance learner engagement and outcomes (Al-Said et al., 2024). These tools facilitate a shift toward multimodal instruction, which enriches the learning experience by supporting diverse cognitive processes and promoting deeper engagement (Tratnik et al., 2019). As such, the application of multimedia tools in Business English education, particularly for economics students, merits further scholarly attention.

Nevertheless, despite growing interest in digital learning tools, the empirical evidence on their effectiveness in Business English instruction remains limited, especially in non-Western educational contexts. For example, in countries such as China and Kazakhstan, important questions remain regarding the extent to which digital tools enhance core Business English skills, including writing, speaking, listening, English in Use, and reading. Furthermore, economics graduates are increasingly expected to demonstrate a wide array of competencies, ranging from crisis management and strategic problem-solving to innovation and leadership (Smith, 2021). Achieving these objectives necessitates a reimagining of language instruction through dynamic, interactive, and contextually relevant teaching methodologies.

Accordingly, this study contributes to the expanding body of ESP research by offering a contextualized examination of educational technology's role in Business English instruction. It aims to enrich the theoretical discourse on multimodal, student-centered pedagogy within the Chinese higher education system. Furthermore, it provides actionable insights into how technology can be strategically deployed to meet the communicative demands of economics students, thereby supporting the broader advancement of ESP pedagogy in comparable academic and professional domains.

The primary objective of this study is to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of an educational intervention that utilizes technology to enhance Business English proficiency among economics students. In pursuit of this objective, the study undertakes three specific tasks. First, it aims to assess the initial level of ESP proficiency among participating students. Second, it seeks to design and implement a technologically enhanced educational intervention tailored to the linguistic and professional needs of economics students, incorporating targeted digital applications. Third, the study evaluates the impact of the intervention on students' performance across multiple language skills through a structured post-test assessment and an analysis of students' experiences with the digital tools used. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how technology integration can enrich ESP instruction and support professional language development in economics education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Business English in English for Specific Purposes

Business English emerged in the 1960s as a rapidly expanding subfield within English for Specific Purposes (ESP), gaining prominence in both instructional practice and academic research (Kutateladze, 2014). The increasing globalization of commerce and the widespread adoption of English as the lingua franca of professional communication underscore its growing importance. English is now frequently used by non-native speakers in business interactions involving employees, clients, and stakeholders from linguistically diverse backgrounds, even when English is not the first language of any party involved.

Business English shares foundational characteristics with other ESP branches, such as the emphasis on needs analysis, curriculum development, course design, and the selection and adaptation of instructional materials (Dhivya et al., 2023). However, what distinguishes Business English is its dual focus on industry-specific content and general business communication skills (Lehman & Sułkowski, 2020). This combination allows learners to acquire both functional language competencies and the specialized discourse required in professional environments.

Consequently, a growing number of universities worldwide have integrated ESP courses into their curricula to address students' career-related language needs. Business English, in particular, has become a key component of the academic training of economics students at both undergraduate and graduate levels, especially in European higher education institutions. According to Rao (2019), these courses aim not only to enhance linguistic

proficiency but also to incorporate discipline-relevant content and foster cross-cultural communicative competence.

At the undergraduate level, ESP courses typically have a broader orientation, focusing primarily on oral communication, although priorities may vary across countries. In contrast, graduate-level instruction tends to emphasize written communication while maintaining oral proficiency as a core component (Gimenez, 2023). This progression reflects the increasing professional demands placed on students as they advance in their academic careers.

Importantly, effective ESP instruction requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates subject-matter expertise in fields such as economics, business management, and commerce with advanced language pedagogy. Therefore, instructors must possess not only linguistic proficiency but also adequate disciplinary knowledge. Their role extends beyond teaching language to adapting methods and content for Business English instruction, thereby making language learning more relevant and motivating for students (Guo et al., 2024).

Students engaged in ESP programs often have distinct learning objectives; they view English not merely as a communicative tool for everyday use but as a critical skill for professional advancement. Hence, it is essential to assess students' individual goals and understand the functional role that English plays within their specific disciplinary context (Fitria, 2019). While preparing students for general communication is already a complex endeavor, a more formidable challenge lies in equipping them with the language skills necessary to function effectively in specialized domains. Recent developments in educational psychology have shifted attention toward learner-centered approaches that emphasize motivation, engagement, and differentiated instruction (Sak, 2024). This paradigm shift has led to a greater appreciation of the varied strategies required to meet the specific learning needs of ESP students.

Furthermore, empirical research suggests that ESP instruction adheres to core methodological principles in which teachers act as language consultants and students as subject-matter experts (Laadem & Mallahi, 2019; Le Vo, 2022). By recognizing these dual roles, it becomes evident that mastery of domain-specific vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse conventions is essential for learners to engage meaningfully with content in their academic and professional fields.

2.2. Challenges of Teaching Business English in Higher Education

Teaching Business English within the context of higher education presents a unique set of challenges that differ from those encountered in General English or English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These challenges span pedagogical, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions and affect various language activities such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Medriano Jr & Bautista, 2020). However, in many university settings where English is treated as a non-core subject, ESP remains undervalued and often misunderstood.

Both instructors and students frequently lack a clear understanding of what constitutes effective ESP pedagogy. One of the major obstacles is the difficulty of implementing communicative language teaching strategies within ESP contexts. Moreover, many instructors lack formal training or expertise in ESP methodology (Muliyah & Aminatun, 2020). In practice, this often leads to fragmented instruction, where discrete language elements such as grammar and vocabulary are taught in isolation, with little guidance on how to synthesize them into coherent communicative performance. Consequently, students may experience reduced motivation and struggle to apply their language knowledge in authentic business contexts.

A significant contributing factor to this issue is the limited pedagogical preparation of ESP instructors, who may default to traditional grammar-translation methods or vocabulary drills that inadequately reflect real-world business communication demands (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020; Ruan, 2019). Furthermore, the shortage of up-to-date, discipline-specific teaching materials that accurately reflect contemporary business practices exacerbates the disconnect between classroom instruction and industry needs.

This problem is particularly acute in non-language departments, where instructors are expected to deliver discipline-specific English instruction without always possessing the necessary content expertise. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish ESP from English for General Purposes (EGP). While EGP instructors often bring valuable teaching experience, ESP requires an additional set of competencies, including familiarity with technical language, professional genres, and workplace communication norms (Van Gorp et al., 2024). As a result, ESP educators are more appropriately described as *practitioners* rather than conventional language teachers. Their responsibilities typically extend to conducting needs assessments, developing tailored courses, adapting instructional materials, and evaluating program effectiveness (Ohki & Cross, 2024). This breadth of responsibility underscores the specialized skillset required to deliver effective ESP instruction.

Moreover, the linguistic characteristics of economic texts pose additional difficulties. These texts are often rich in domain-specific terminology, idiomatic expressions, and fixed phrases, with information-dense content serving a central functional role (Sheng, 2023). Memorizing such language can be challenging for learners, particularly when instruction lacks contextualization. To address this issue, the lexical approach has been proposed, which emphasizes the acquisition of vocabulary in meaningful contexts (Xie, 2021). However, the successful implementation of this approach demands frequent exposure to authentic language use and a focus on

high-frequency, discipline-relevant concepts. For economics students, this is particularly critical, given the dense technical language used in their field.

Therefore, the existing literature highlights several critical shortcomings in current Business English instruction in higher education. Despite the increasing demand for specialized communication skills, ESP remains underrepresented in academic curricula, and there is a widespread lack of clarity regarding its pedagogical aims. Instructional approaches often rely on disconnected grammar and vocabulary exercises, with insufficient attention to real-world communicative practices. This results in diminished student engagement and a failure to develop practical language skills. Additionally, the scarcity of current and authentic materials limits students' exposure to professional discourse. Although lexical approaches offer some promise, their effectiveness in varied learning environments remains insufficiently explored. These gaps underscore the urgent need for pedagogical innovations that integrate technology with authentic materials to enhance Business English instruction for economics students.

2.3. Technology-Enhanced Instruction in Business English

For Business English instruction to yield effective learning outcomes, students must be provided with opportunities to engage in a wide range of communicative and skill-enhancing activities. The integration of technology into language education has introduced diverse audio-visual resources, such as videos, podcasts, and recorded dialogues, which have significantly increased learner engagement and improved the overall appeal of the learning process (Høydal et al., 2024). For example, podcasts have been successfully incorporated into foreign language education, including instruction in Russian as a foreign language, demonstrating their broad applicability and potential to enhance listening comprehension (Makhanova et al., 2023).

One particularly innovative instructional technique involves the combination of audio input with visual representations to support both comprehension and formative assessment. This multimodal approach entails the use of images, whether physical illustrations from print media or digital visuals sourced online, that correspond to the audio content. In economics education, such materials may include photographs, diagrams, collages, maps, and charts, either with or without accompanying text (Ayadi & Onodipe, 2023). These visual resources are frequently employed by instructors to explain economic concepts, stimulate discussion, and simultaneously develop students' vocabulary and communicative skills.

Moreover, empirical studies underscore the value of exposing ESP learners to a variety of spoken genres, including business conversations, negotiations, interviews, and functional monologues (Xu, 2022). Such exposure enables learners to become familiar with authentic vocabulary, syntactic patterns, and discourse structures used in professional settings. Additionally, these listening activities help learners develop the capacity to ask and answer questions fluently, thereby facilitating the transfer of linguistic knowledge to real-world business scenarios. As a result, students are better equipped to internalize domain-specific terminology and engage in meaningful professional communication.

Another effective pedagogical strategy involves the use of audio and video recordings of interviews. These materials may include simulations of job interviews, boardroom meetings, or journalistic exchanges intended to extract key facts or opinions (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020). Video-based instruction offers distinct advantages over purely audio input, as it provides contextual cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, and visual setting, that significantly enhance comprehension. However, for such resources to be pedagogically effective, instructors must clearly articulate the listening objectives and assign structured tasks that require learners to interact with the material actively. Furthermore, visual storytelling techniques have been found to foster abstraction and multisensory learning, thus promoting higher levels of learner engagement and comprehension in Business English instruction.

Instructors can also leverage publicly available online videos, films, and educational clips, or produce their own instructional recordings, to enrich their courses and capture students' attention (Fiddiyasari & Pustika, 2021). Nevertheless, careful consideration must be given to the selection of such materials. Key elements such as the quality of visual imagery, the dynamics of character interaction, paralinguistic cues (e.g., tone of voice, pace, and intonation), and non-verbal communication (e.g., gestures and posture) all contribute to the learner's interpretive process (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Videos may serve multiple pedagogical functions, from warm-up exercises and content previews to structured speaking, writing, and critical thinking tasks. For example, instructors may use them to facilitate classroom discussions, debates, Q&A activities, and reflective essays, each of which supports the development of multiple language skills simultaneously.

Therefore, while a range of promising approaches to integrating technology in Business English instruction exists, these strategies have not been sufficiently examined within the context of discipline-specific instruction for economics students. This represents a notable empirical gap, particularly in light of China's increasing global economic integration and the corresponding need for professionals capable of operating in English-speaking environments. As workplace communication becomes increasingly internationalized, the imperative to equip learners with pragmatic and adaptive language skills becomes even more urgent.

Thus, further research is warranted to investigate the role of digital tools in the teaching of ESP, particularly as it relates to economics and related business disciplines. The present study is positioned within the broader ESP

framework and conceptually aligned with the growing literature on Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). BELF emphasizes the use of English as a shared, functional tool for communication among non-native speakers in global business contexts. It prioritizes intelligibility, flexibility, and pragmatic competence over native-like fluency. This approach is particularly relevant to Chinese economics students, who must navigate diverse professional interactions where English is used not for cultural assimilation but as a practical means of cross-cultural exchange. By focusing on BELF principles and leveraging modern educational technologies, this study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced and effective model of Business English instruction for non-native speakers in globalized economic sectors.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. Research Design

This study employed an action research methodology, which entails the systematic investigation of one's own teaching practice with the aim of improving instructional effectiveness. Action research is particularly suited for educational interventions, as it involves iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Susman & Evered, 2023). Within this framework, researchers simultaneously implement an instructional intervention and collect data to analyze its outcomes in a classroom context.

The initial stage involved designing the intervention, which included the selection of appropriate digital tools for teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to economics students. To establish a baseline, a pre-test was administered to evaluate students' initial language proficiency. Following this, the instructional design and assessment framework were developed and implemented during the action phase of the research. During this phase, the intervention was carried out, and students' learning experiences were monitored and documented through observation. The final stage incorporated post-testing, student surveys, and descriptive statistical analysis, supplemented by qualitative contextual interpretation. These processes enabled reflective evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness, thereby completing the action research cycle. Therefore, this methodological approach allowed for the generation of both quantitative and qualitative insights relevant to the instructional goals.

3.2. Intervention Procedures

The intervention was embedded in a Business English course delivered over two academic semesters. Students attended one 90-minute lesson per week, totaling approximately 30 instructional hours per semester (60 hours overall), which corresponded to 4 ECTS credits. The curriculum was centered on key business communication domains, including professional correspondence, meetings, negotiations, and financial discourse. Both the experimental and control groups followed an identical core curriculum and utilized the same instructional materials, including the *Market Leader* textbook (3rd edition) and supplementary resources developed by instructors. The only distinction was that the experimental group received additional exposure to multimedia learning tools. By holding instructional hours, syllabus content, and assessment mechanisms constant, while varying only the integration of technology, this design aimed to isolate the effects of technology-enhanced instruction on students' Business English proficiency.

The tools selected for the experimental group were chosen based on current pedagogical recommendations in ESP education (Dou et al., 2023). These tools were designed to support multisensory learning and promote student engagement through audiovisual and mobile-accessible content. Two core platforms were implemented: the CNBC Business News and Finance app and the Business English Pod application (Figure 1).

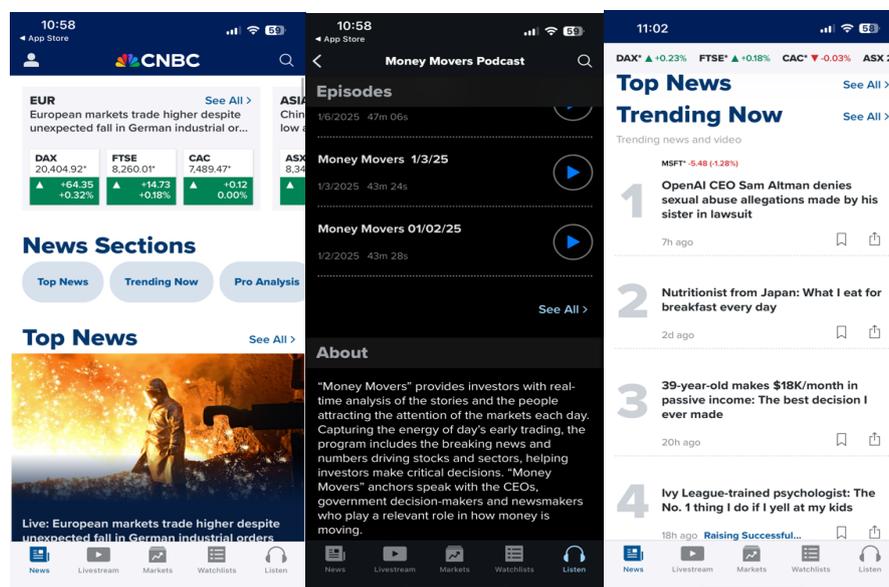


Figure 1: Features of the CNBC Business News and Finance App. Source: CNBC (2025).

The CNBC Business News and Finance app, developed by one of the world's leading business media networks, provides real-time financial news and market data from platforms such as the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and NASDAQ. It also offers access to programs like *Mad Money* and *American Greed*, as well as pre-market and post-market trading updates data (Figure 1). Within the course, this app was used during class sessions through a range of activities, including reading articles, watching videos, and engaging in discussions. Instructors allocated approximately 30 minutes of each session to app-based tasks. Students were encouraged to analyze business models, evaluate corporate decisions, and interpret market trends using the app's resources. These tasks allowed learners to apply newly acquired vocabulary in realistic business contexts.

To further reinforce comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, listening tasks based on audio segments from the app were assigned, followed by written summaries or responses to comprehension questions. Students were also asked to write short essays or reports based on selected news stories, incorporating analytical and critical perspectives. These writing tasks were designed to promote not only linguistic competence but also economic reasoning and professional communication skills.

Business English Pod offers free podcast lessons for Business English ESL learners and audio courses/e-books for students at the intermediate and advanced levels (Figure 2).

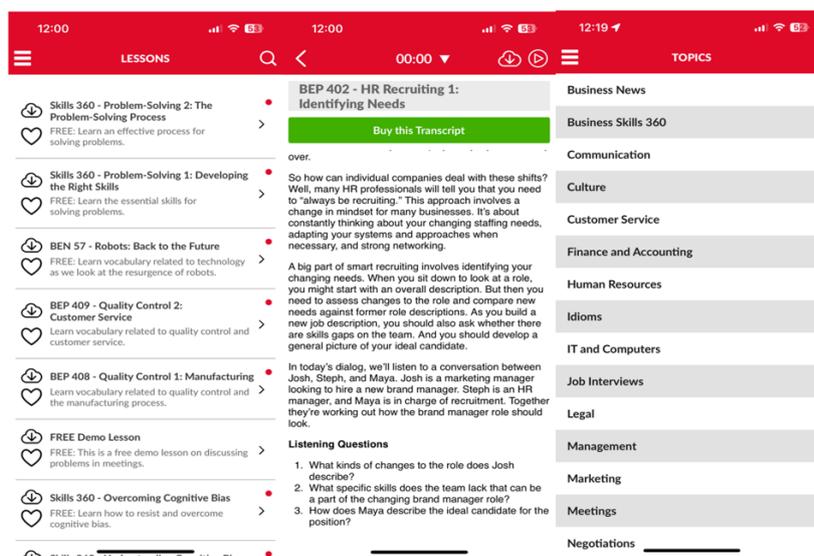


Figure 2: Organization of Materials and Tasks in the Business English Pod App. Source: Business English Pod (2025)

In addition, the course integrated the Business English Pod platform, which offers structured MP3 podcast lessons and downloadable e-books focused on a range of Business English competencies. These lessons cover communicative functions such as presenting, negotiating, persuading, disagreeing, and clarifying. Each lesson includes model dialogues, vocabulary explanations, idiomatic usage, and follow-up exercises. Students listened to these lessons in class and completed associated comprehension and vocabulary tasks. Approximately 30 minutes of each weekly session was devoted to working with the Business English Pod content.

Importantly, these digital tools were not intended to replace the existing curriculum but were integrated into the instructional framework to supplement and enhance traditional classroom activities. The applications supported both collaborative learning in the classroom and independent study outside class hours. The course was designed to alternate between the two apps on a weekly basis, maintaining pedagogical consistency while diversifying learning modalities. Although students were encouraged to engage with the apps outside of scheduled lessons, such use was neither monitored nor included in the formal assessment criteria.

The course was facilitated by a team of four ESP instructors, each holding at least a master's degree in Applied Linguistics and possessing a minimum of five years' experience in teaching Business English in higher education. Moreover, all instructors held additional academic qualifications in economics or finance, ensuring their capacity to deliver content that was both linguistically and professionally relevant..

3.3. Sample

The sample for this study comprised 150 Chinese undergraduate students (84 females and 66 males) enrolled at [BLINDED] University. Business English is introduced as part of the curriculum in the second year of study at this institution; thus, the university administration provided a list of second-year students eligible to participate. Invitations were distributed via email to all 300 students registered for the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, and 150 students voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. Those who did not provide informed consent were excluded from participation. Consequently, the final sample consisted of students aged between 19 and 21 years, with a mean age of 20.

Participants were drawn from a range of academic disciplines, including economics and finance, business and business administration, international economics and trade, economic statistics, and accounting. Instruction in these programs is primarily delivered in Mandarin Chinese. Prior to the commencement of the study, it was verified that all participants owned at least one type of mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet, ensuring compatibility with the intervention tools. The 150 students were then randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group, with 75 students in each. While the control group followed the traditional ESP curriculum, the experimental group participated in an instructional program specifically designed for this research, integrating technology-enhanced learning tools.

3.4. Pre and Post-Test

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Business English intervention, a pre-test and post-test methodology was adopted in accordance with the experimental design. Both tests were drawn from the *Tests of Business English* collection by Popescu-Furnea and Herțeg (2010), which includes 20 standardized versions, each consisting of five distinct sections. The structure of these tests closely mirrors the Cambridge Business English Certificate (BEC) Higher level, thereby ensuring content validity and relevance to professional contexts.

The Listening section consisted of dialogues featuring two or more speakers, with eight multiple-choice questions per passage. Each recording was played twice, and students were required to interpret the content accurately. The Reading section comprised texts sourced from authentic online business publications, presented either in their original form or with slight modifications, always accompanied by proper attribution. The English in Use section included a variety of exercises, such as vocabulary-based cloze tests, word formation tasks, proofreading activities, and sentence matching, many of which were modeled after BEC formats. The Writing section required students to compose a business letter of 200 to 250 words, such as a proposal, report, or professional correspondence, including complaint, apology, or application letters. Finally, the Speaking section consisted of two parts: an introductory self-presentation followed by a four-minute business presentation on a topic of the candidate's choice.

Testing for both groups was conducted under standardized classroom conditions, supervised by instructors who also served as evaluators. The 20 test versions were randomly distributed among the students during both pre-test and post-test administrations. Each session lasted 2.5 hours, and the oral component was administered separately in a designated room. Each of the five parameters was assessed independently, with a maximum score of 70 points assigned to each section. This rigorous assessment procedure ensured a comprehensive evaluation of students' Business English proficiency across all key language skills.

3.5. Survey

To gain deeper insights into the learners' perceptions of the intervention, an online survey was developed by the research team and administered to the experimental group using Google Forms (Appendix 1). This survey was designed to complement the test-based data by capturing qualitative information relevant to the research objectives. Specifically, the survey focused on six key constructs: perceived effectiveness, skill development, learner engagement, usage of multimedia tools outside the classroom, professional confidence, and barriers to learning. These constructs were derived from the pedagogical goals of the intervention and are aligned with the theoretical foundations of ESP instruction (Dou et al., 2023).

Prior to the full deployment of the survey, a pilot study was conducted to assess item clarity and overall usability. Participants in the pilot phase were invited to provide feedback, and revisions were made to improve the clarity of several survey items. Additionally, a reliability analysis was carried out on the 12-item instrument to evaluate its internal consistency. The results yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, which indicates a satisfactory level of reliability for educational research.

Following these preliminary steps, the final survey was administered to the experimental group in a supervised classroom setting. Although students received the survey via email through a secure link, they were encouraged to complete it at their own pace. They were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and would be used solely for academic research purposes. This approach ensured both ethical integrity and data accuracy, while also promoting honest and thoughtful participation from respondents.

3.6. Data Analysis

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the collected data. Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25, a widely recognized statistical software package. To evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional intervention, comparisons between the experimental and control groups were conducted using independent samples t-tests. In addition, standard deviations were calculated to assess the variability within each group and to control for any inconsistencies between the pilot study and final experimental data. This analytical framework ensured a rigorous comparison of outcomes, supporting the validity of the statistical findings.

3.7. Research Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample was drawn from a single university, and all participants were second-year undergraduate students. This homogeneity presents a constraint, as second-year students may not yet possess the fully developed academic or professional language needs characteristic of senior students who are closer to entering the workforce. Therefore, the findings may not reflect the linguistic and communicative requirements of more advanced learners.

Moreover, the research was conducted exclusively in China, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational systems that operate under different linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical frameworks. Since the study is confined to a single national and institutional context, caution must be exercised when extrapolating results to broader international settings.

Another limitation concerns the scope of the intervention tools. Only two specific platforms, the CNBC Business News and Finance app and the Business English Pod, were used in the instructional design. While both tools are pedagogically robust, relying solely on them may have inadvertently emphasized certain language skills (e.g., listening and reading) while underrepresenting others, such as writing and speaking in spontaneous settings. This selective exposure may have skewed the assessment of skill development.

Additionally, satisfaction with the instructional experience was measured only in the experimental group. This decision was aligned with the study's primary objective: to assess the perceived effectiveness and usability of the new intervention tools. Since the control group followed a traditional curriculum, evaluating their satisfaction was considered less relevant to the research aims. However, the exclusion of the control group from the satisfaction analysis limits our ability to draw comparative conclusions regarding learner preferences and motivation under different instructional modalities.

3.8. Ethical Issues

In this study, all processes involving human participants were conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. All participants included in the study were informed about the details of the experiment and provided written informed consent. They were also informed that they could withdraw from participation at any stage of the study. Thus, the research process fully adhered to the ethical guidelines throughout.

4. Results

4.1. Pre-Test

All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with internationally recognized ethical research standards. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation. They were also explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Therefore, the research process upheld the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and participant confidentiality, ensuring ethical integrity throughout the study.

Table 1: Pre-test Results in the Two Groups

Group	N	M (SD)	Group	N	M (SD)	t-value	p-value
Experimental	75		Control	75			
Listening		46.40 (10.23)	Listening		43.18 (9.36)	2.01	0.046
Reading		52.67 (9.85)	Reading		50.92 (10.50)	1.05	0.294
English in Use		43.25 (11.12)	English in Use		41.00 (9.84)	1.31	0.191
Writing		39.10 (8.75)	Writing		36.25 (7.90)	2.09	0.038
Speaking		48.92 (7.48)	Speaking		45.56 (8.37)	2.59	0.011

Source: Own research

The results of the pre-intervention assessment revealed that initial differences between the experimental and control groups were minimal, as anticipated. However, students in the experimental group demonstrated slightly higher average scores across all skill domains. As shown in Table 1, the mean overall score for the experimental group was 60.31 out of 80, compared to 57.19 for the control group.

A closer examination of individual parameters indicates that the experimental group performed best in the *Reading* section, whereas *Writing* emerged as the weakest area for both groups. The highest variability in student performance was observed in the *English in Use* section, as indicated by its standard deviation, suggesting significant individual differences in vocabulary and grammar proficiency. In contrast, the control group exhibited lower performance across all sections, with *Writing* again being the least proficient domain, reflected in an average score of 36.25. Notably, although the *Reading* scores were the highest in both groups, the experimental group outperformed the control group in this domain as well.

Statistical analysis using the *t*-test revealed that differences in *Listening*, *Writing*, and *Speaking* between the two groups were statistically significant, with p-values below the 0.05 threshold. Conversely, differences in

Reading and *English in Use* were not statistically significant, as their p-values exceeded the cutoff. These findings suggest that while both groups started with similar proficiency levels in most areas, the experimental group held a slight initial advantage, particularly in listening and oral communication.

Furthermore, the low performance in the *Speaking* section across both groups highlights a broader challenge in developing spoken fluency among students. This may be attributed to several factors. One plausible explanation is that students entered their undergraduate programs with inadequate foundational proficiency in English. Consequently, despite being enrolled in mandatory Business English courses, they may have struggled to meet the linguistic demands of advanced oral communication tasks. It is also possible that previous instruction lacked sufficient focus on interactive and communicative speaking activities. Therefore, although the differences observed in the pre-test were relatively minor, the comparable baseline between the groups supports the validity of subsequent comparisons and provides a solid foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention.

4.2. Post-Test

The results from the post-test reveal a statistically significant improvement in the Business English proficiency of economics students, particularly among those in the experimental group, thereby affirming the effectiveness of the technology-enhanced instructional intervention. Substantial gains were observed across all evaluated parameters (see Table 2), with notable increases in scores for listening, reading, and writing. These results suggest that the instructional approach implemented in the experimental group not only addressed previously identified weaknesses but also promoted consistent advancement in multiple skill domains..

Table 2: Post-test Results in the Two Groups

Group	N	M (SD)	Group	N	M (SD)	t-value	p-value
Experimental	75		Control	75			
Listening		55.42 (8.75)			46.85 (9.16)	5.86	2.92×10 ⁻⁸
Reading		64.21 (7.68)			52.89 (10.24)	7.66	3.03×10 ⁻¹²
English in Use		54.10 (9.84)			44.50 (9.67)	6.03	1.28×10 ⁻⁸
Writing		49.75 (6.55)			39.50 (8.10)	8.52	2.10×10 ⁻¹⁴
Speaking		56.70 (6.80)			48.95 (7.90)	6.44	1.66×10 ⁻⁹

Source: Own research

Specifically, the average listening scores in the experimental group increased markedly from 46.40 to 55.42, while reading scores rose from 52.67 to 64.21. Furthermore, writing scores improved from 39.10 to 49.75, indicating a strengthened performance in a domain that had previously been identified as underdeveloped. Although the control group also demonstrated slight progress, with listening scores increasing from 43.18 to 46.85 and reading scores rising from 50.92 to 52.89, these gains were considerably smaller. For instance, the listening score increase in the control group amounted to only +3.67 points, compared to nearly +9 points in the experimental group. Similarly, writing scores in the control group improved by just +3.25 points, less than one-third of the gains achieved by the experimental group.

These within-group comparisons underscore that although both groups benefitted from continued instruction, the experimental group experienced more substantial and consistent learning outcomes. The intervention clearly yielded added value by enhancing performance in areas where baseline proficiency was initially weaker.

The statistical analysis further supports the efficacy of the intervention. The *t*-value of 5.86 for listening, accompanied by a p-value below 0.01, indicates a statistically significant difference in post-test results between the two groups. Even stronger effects were observed in other domains. For example, the *t*-value of 7.66 in the reading section suggests a highly significant improvement in comprehension abilities, while the *t*-value of 6.03 in the English in Use component points to enhanced grammatical and lexical command in professional contexts.

Most notably, the writing section demonstrated the strongest effect, with a *t*-value of 8.52 and a p-value less than 0.001, indicating highly significant improvements. Speaking and reading also displayed significant gains, suggesting that the tools used in the intervention were particularly effective in fostering productive and receptive skills. These outcomes imply that the integration of digital tools into ESP instruction, specifically, those that emphasize listening, analysis, and contextual application, has a positive and measurable impact on students' language development in business-related contexts.

4.3. Survey

All 75 students in the experimental group completed a post-intervention survey designed to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the ESP instructional tools and strategies. The results indicate a high level of overall satisfaction with the intervention, while also identifying areas requiring further attention.

When asked to assess the effectiveness of the instructional tools on a 5-point scale, 77% of students rated the intervention as either "very effective" (44%) or "effective" (33%). This high level of approval suggests that the technology-enhanced approach was well-received and deemed beneficial for skill acquisition. According to the survey responses, the greatest improvements were reported in reading comprehension (80%), vocabulary

acquisition (73.33%), and listening comprehension (66.67%). In addition, 60% of students reported enhanced writing skills, and 40% noted improvements in speaking proficiency.

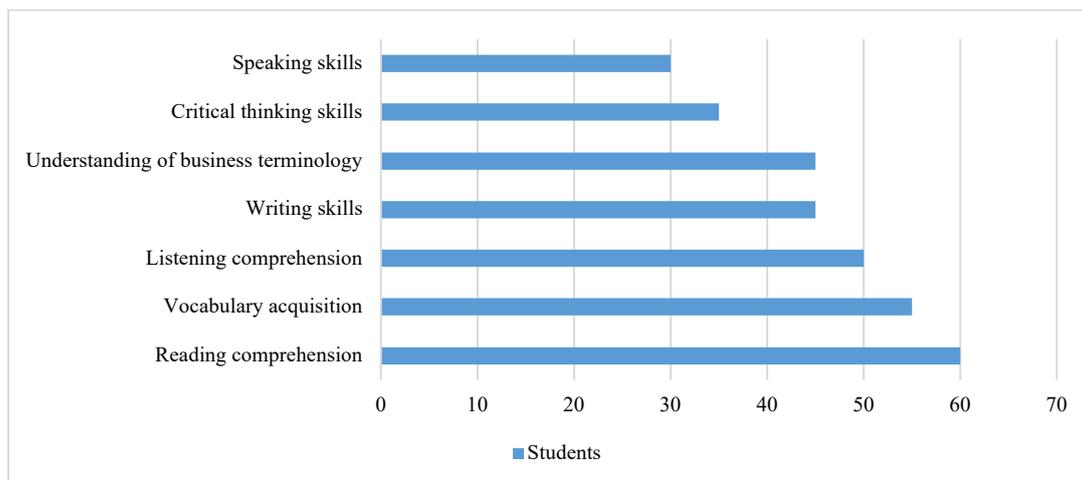


Figure 3: Summary of Skill Improvement. Source: Own research

The majority of students (86.66%) also indicated that the use of audiovisual materials and mobile applications significantly enriched the learning process. This included activities involving both the *Business English Pod* and the *CNBC Business News and Finance* app. However, only 40% of students found the lessons using the CNBC app to be highly engaging. This may suggest that students were less motivated by text-heavy financial content, which typically demands greater cognitive effort and sustained reading attention. It is possible that the dense, information-rich nature of authentic financial texts posed challenges in comprehension or relevance, particularly when compared to more interactive or visually engaging tools.

Moreover, these findings may reflect a broader learner preference for multimodal and accessible learning formats. Alternatively, the relatively lower engagement with financial news may indicate a skill gap in navigating complex professional texts, which could contribute to a sense of cognitive overload and reduced motivation. Nevertheless, 77.33% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the instructional tools aligned with their academic interests and professional goals, reinforcing the relevance of the intervention for future career preparedness.

In terms of activity preferences, 40% of respondents reported that reading and discussing news articles was the most beneficial aspect of the CNBC app, while 33.33% favored the *Business English Pod*, particularly for its vocabulary-building and conversation practice features. Furthermore, the intervention had a positive effect on learners' professional confidence, with 86.66% reporting increased confidence in their ability to use English in business settings following the course.

Despite these positive outcomes, some challenges were identified. Only 20% of students reported frequent use of the applications outside class, while 40% used them occasionally. This limited out-of-class engagement suggests a dependence on structured classroom activities and highlights a potential barrier to the development of self-directed learning habits. Additionally, 40% of students cited time constraints as a key barrier to independent use of the tools, while 20% reported encountering technical difficulties. A small percentage of students expressed a lack of motivation to study Business English, though this remained relatively minor.

In summary, the survey results confirm that the intervention was largely successful in enhancing language skills and learner engagement. However, the findings also indicate a need to address issues related to learner autonomy, time management, and technology accessibility to further maximize the benefits of technology-integrated ESP instruction.

5. Discussion

This study underscores the importance of implementing a high-quality English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course through the integration of diverse and interactive teaching methods tailored to the needs of economics students. The findings reveal that methodological innovations in ESP instruction increasingly emphasize interactive strategies, aligning with existing research that advocates for the pedagogical value of role-playing, brainstorming, and task-based learning in language education for future economists (Ho, 2020). These interactive approaches foster active participation among learners, promote real-time communication, and facilitate the acquisition of both linguistic and professional competencies in a foreign language.

Moreover, alternative technological solutions have been proposed to address the limitations of conventional Business English instruction, particularly the issue of low student performance. For example, Xu (2022) introduced a virtual reality-based immersion platform simulating business negotiations in English. The outcomes of that study demonstrated that students taught through virtual simulations achieved significantly higher scores than those in

traditional classrooms, suggesting that immersive digital environments can enhance language learning outcomes in applied business contexts.

In line with these trends, the present study demonstrated that students in the experimental group showed substantial post-test improvements across all parameters when compared to the control group, thereby affirming the pedagogical value of integrating multimedia tools into Business English instruction. The most notable improvement was observed in writing performance. This enhancement may be attributed to the inclusion of structured writing activities that required learners to analyze business-related content and compose professional documents such as reports and essays. These tasks, supported by content from the CNBC Business News and Finance app, allowed students to apply business-specific vocabulary, organize arguments coherently, and refine their written expression in a professional register. The guided reflection activities embedded in the course likely further reinforced students' cognitive engagement with the material.

Although the integration of e-learning platforms has long been advocated to enhance ESP instruction, critics have pointed out that some vocational and technical branches of ESP still rely on ad hoc or intuition-driven methods, often lacking consistent theoretical underpinnings (Basturkmen, 2022). In response to this concern, recent research has explored more theoretically grounded approaches, such as the combination of constructivist grammar with data-driven learning models (Yan, 2022). One such approach involves the implementation of intelligent e-learning systems powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP), which allow learners to access and interact with extensive corpora across specialized domains. These systems promote autonomous and self-regulated learning, enabling students to identify linguistic patterns and apply disciplinary knowledge in meaningful contexts. When integrated into ESP instruction, these intelligent platforms have been shown to significantly enhance both language acquisition and learner autonomy.

These findings resonate with the results of the current study, wherein 86.66% of students reported that the use of mobile applications and audiovisual resources, specifically the Business English Pod and CNBC app, was either helpful or very helpful in enhancing their learning experience. This feedback underscores the importance of multimodal learning tools in improving student engagement and supporting the development of language skills in authentic business contexts.

Furthermore, the results of this study align with broader digital and policy trends in language education across the European Union, where the integration of technology in ESP is increasingly shaping curriculum design and instructional delivery (Mihăeș, 2021). In particular, contemporary task-based models are being updated to incorporate multimedia, collaborative, and learner-centered features. For instance, Ining (2021) conducted a study on an online Business English course in higher education, which also demonstrated that modern applications could support skill development and learner satisfaction.

The present findings further support this trajectory. A majority of students in the experimental group evaluated the intervention positively, with 77% rating the overall effectiveness of the tools as either "very effective" (44%) or "effective" (33%). These results suggest that the carefully selected technological tools succeeded in aligning instruction with students' academic and professional goals. However, the post-test results also indicate only partial success, as improvements in listening and language usage (English in Use) were less substantial. This suggests that while the intervention was effective in enhancing writing, reading, and speaking, additional instructional strategies may be necessary to strengthen receptive auditory skills and applied grammar knowledge.

Therefore, while the integration of multimedia tools in Business English instruction has yielded promising outcomes, future iterations of the course should consider diversifying the range of digital resources and pedagogical strategies to ensure a more comprehensive improvement across all language competencies. Additional research is also warranted to explore the long-term impact of such interventions on learners' professional performance and language retention.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated the impact of a technology-enhanced educational intervention on the English language proficiency of undergraduate economics students. By comparing the outcomes of an experimental group, who received instruction incorporating the *CNBC Business News and Finance* app and *Business English Pod*, with a control group taught using traditional methods, the research generated valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital tools in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction.

The results of the pre-test indicated no significant differences between the two groups in terms of their initial language competency levels across most parameters. However, writing emerged as a common area of weakness in both groups, highlighting the need for more targeted pedagogical strategies to support written communication in Business English.

Following the intervention, the post-test results demonstrated that students in the experimental group showed significantly improved performance across all measured domains, particularly in listening, reading, and writing. The substantial t-values and consistently low p-values confirmed the statistical significance of these improvements. Notably, the greatest gains were observed in writing ($t = 8$), a finding that can be attributed to the intervention's inclusion of structured writing tasks informed by authentic business content. These tasks, supported by multimedia

input and guided reflection, likely helped students develop more organized ideas, apply context-specific vocabulary, and construct coherent professional texts.

7. Implications

The findings of this study have both theoretical and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, the results lend empirical support to existing frameworks in data-driven learning and task-based pedagogy, emphasizing the value of industry-relevant, authentic materials in fostering learner engagement and linguistic competence. The use of real-world business content, such as that found in financial news apps and professional podcasts, appears to enhance students' motivation and aligns instruction more closely with real-life communication needs.

From a pedagogical perspective, this research offers a viable model for instructors and curriculum designers seeking to modernize Business English instruction. The integration of multimedia tools into traditional curricula demonstrates how targeted digital interventions can help close persistent learning gaps, particularly in writing. Therefore, outcome-oriented, content-integrated activities should be more widely adopted in ESP classrooms to facilitate the transfer of language skills to professional domains.

Moreover, the findings suggest that similar interventions can be adapted to other ESP contexts beyond economics, including law, engineering, healthcare, and tourism, where specialized communication skills are essential. The demonstrated effectiveness of multimedia learning environments also reinforces the broader pedagogical shift toward blended and autonomous learning approaches.

In conclusion, the incorporation of technology in ESP education, when implemented with pedagogical intent and supported by authentic materials, can meaningfully enhance students' language competencies. As technological innovations in education continue to evolve, future research should explore scalable models of such interventions across disciplines and institutions, ultimately contributing to the academic success and professional readiness of graduates in the global labor market.

Acknowledgement Statement: The authors would like to thank to all participants and the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution statements: Author 1 contributed to the Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, and Writing - Original Draft; Author 2 contributed to Software, Validation, and Data Curation; Author 3 contributed to Validation, Investigation, and Resources; Author 4 contributed to Validation, Data Curation, Investigation; Author 5 contributed to Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision and Project Administration.

Funding statements: As there was no external funding received for this research, the study was conducted without financial support from any funding agency or organization.

Data availability statement: Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect JICC's or editors' official policy or position. All liability for harm done to individuals or property as a result of any ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content is expressly disclaimed.

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Appendix 1: Survey for Evaluating Students' Experience with the CNBC Business News and Finance App and Business English Pod

On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the overall effectiveness of the intervention tools? (1 = very ineffective, 5 = very effective)

1. **Which of the following skills do you think improved the most as a result of the intervention? (You can select multiple options.)**
 - Listening
 - Speaking
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Vocabulary
2. **Did you find the integration of technology (e.g., apps, audiovisual materials) helpful for your learning?**
 - Very helpful
 - Helpful
 - Neutral
 - Not helpful
3. **Do you agree that the intervention aligned with your professional goals or interests?**
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
4. **How engaging did you find the sessions using the CNBC Business News and Finance app?**
 - Very engaging
 - Engaging
 - Neutral
 - Not engaging
5. **Which type of activity did you find most useful when using the CNBC app?**
 - Reading and discussing news articles
 - Summarizing videos
 - Writing short reports or essays
 - Learning and applying new terms
6. **How engaging did you find the sessions using Business English Pod?**
 - Very engaging
 - Engaging
 - Neutral
 - Not engaging
7. **Which activity related to Business English Pod did you find most useful?**
 - Listening to dialogues
 - Answering questions based on the text
 - Practicing and learning new vocabulary
 - Using idioms and phrases in discussions
8. **Which specific aspects of your English skills do you think improved the most? (Select all that apply)**
 - Vocabulary acquisition
 - Listening comprehension
 - Reading comprehension
 - Writing skills
 - Speaking skills
 - Understanding business terminology
 - Critical thinking skills
9. **Did you use the CNBC Business News and Finance app or Business English Pod outside of class?**
 - Often
 - Occasionally
 - Rarely
 - Never
10. **How confident are you in using English for professional purposes after completing the course?**

- Very confident
- Confident
- Not confident
- Not confident at all

11. What problems did you encounter when using the intervention tools? (Select all that apply)

- Difficulty understanding the material
- Time constraints for using the apps
- Technical problems with the apps
- Lack of motivation to study Business English
- Other (please specify):