

Enhancing Global Competitiveness: The Role of English in Construction Vocational Training

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The increasing globalization of the construction industry has increased the demand for multilingual professionals capable of succeeding in diverse environments. This research investigates the convenience and effectiveness of teaching English to construction vocational students in Kuwait, namely the Construction Training Institute (CTI), focusing on improving their employability and competitiveness. This study examines the potential benefits of using English as the medium of instruction in CTI, not only in English for special purposes (ESP) classes, but all other technical lectures. This will address the challenges in the vocational institutions and students' challenges in adopting English, including language proficiency barriers and curriculum adjustment. The study highlights the importance of delivering effective instructions while developing students' technical skills. This study provides practical strategies for improving and enhancing the vocational education system while preparing CTI students for an increasingly interconnected global workforce.

KEYWORDS;- Construction Training, ESP, globalization, workforce

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I. INTRODUCTION

Kuwait relies significantly on oil production and associated industries, “with the energy sector accounting for the majority of its government revenue” ([https:// research.hktdc.com](https://research.hktdc.com)). It has three major large industries Kuwait Petroleum Company (KPC), Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), and Kuwait National Petroleum Company. (KNPC). All major industries recruit CTI students after graduation and other private sector industries. These major industries require English-speaking staff to engage with foreign employees. Nevertheless, these sectors often operate internationally and seek professionals who can communicate effectively.

CTI plays a crucial role in providing students with practical skills and technical knowledge. It tailors the ESP course to bridge the gap of knowledge in acquiring the language needed to communicate in their vocational domain. Nevertheless, technical English presents several challenges that may impede the acquisition. These impediments are cultural differences, language proficiency, and curriculum development. This study will examine these obstacles. In CTI students' level of English proficiency varies. Students come from backgrounds where English is not the primary language or the second language. It may sometimes, be a language that is newly introduced to them. Therefore, English is a great challenge for students to comprehend the technical jargon and concepts expressed in English. A study by Timmis (2014) shows that students with limited comprehension of language find it hard to interact with course materials which results in a lack of academic performance will result in lack of confidence [1].

On the other hand, cultural differences play a significant role in the challenges of teaching ESP. Different cultures can have a great impact on pedagogical approaches and learning styles. As Biggs and Tang (2011) said some cultures emphasize rote memorizing in learning while others encourage critical thinking [2].

Another significant challenge in acquiring technical English is the implementation of an ESP curriculum. Technical subjects and jargon often require up-to-date knowledge and practice, which must be reflected in the curriculum. Kearney and Cuthbert (2015) suggested that English language instruction can be complex and vocational educators must align the curriculum with the workforce of the domain and incorporate language development strategies [3]. All aspects must be looked at thoroughly so there will be no burden or limitation that inhibits students learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Global Language Trends in Vocational Education

As construction professionals are often required to work on international projects, English has become the dominant language in technical education and related fields. Graddol (2006) emphasizes that English is the global language of business, science, and, increasingly, vocational sectors like construction [4]. Evans (2010) demonstrates that English proficiency enhances career mobility in technical fields, where much of the industry's critical knowledge—such as manuals and international standards—is communicated in English [5]. English-medium instruction (EMI) in vocational training has grown in popularity, particularly in industries like construction, which require cross-border collaboration. Studies (Macaro et al., 2018) show that EMI equips students with a competitive advantage in global job markets by granting them access to international resources and guidelines (Airey, 2011) [6,7].

2.2. Challenges of English Medium Instruction (EMI)

While there are undeniable advantages to teaching in English, research also highlights the challenges that students and instructors face when implementing EMI in vocational education. One significant issue is the varying levels of English proficiency among students. Vocational students often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, and their primary focus tends to be on practical skills rather than academic subjects, making it more difficult for them to grasp technical concepts when taught in a second language (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010) [8]. A study by Evans and Morrison (2011) found that students in EMI programs frequently struggled with specific vocabulary related to their field of study, which in construction includes complex technical terms and jargon that are rarely used in everyday language [9].

Moreover, research suggests that teaching in English can slow down the learning process for vocational students. According to Airey (2011), students in EMI programs often take longer to understand course material, leading to frustration and disengagement [7]. Instructors, on the other hand, are tasked with not only teaching technical content but also ensuring that students understand and are able to apply it in English, which can be a challenging balance to strike. Additionally, vocational teachers may not be fully prepared or trained to teach in English, which can further hinder the learning experience (Dearden, 2014) [10].

2.3. The Role of Language in Employability

Despite the challenges, several studies underscore the long-term benefits of English instruction in vocational education, particularly in enhancing employability. Research by Coleman (2006) points out that English language skills are increasingly sought after by employers in technical fields such as construction, especially in multinational companies or projects that require cross-border collaboration [11]. In many cases, proficiency in English is a key criterion for hiring and promotions, even for technically skilled roles (Chiswick & Miller, 2010). For students in construction vocational programs, learning English can open doors to international opportunities, making them more versatile and employable in a global market.

In addition to improving job prospects, English also provides vocational students with the tools needed to access international certifications and standards. For example, many global certifications for safety, quality control, and environmental management in construction are administered in English. As noted by Evans (2010), students who are proficient in English are better positioned to attain these certifications, thereby boosting their career prospects and ability to work on international projects [5]. Furthermore, having English as a working language can enhance communication with clients, suppliers, and regulatory bodies, further strengthening the professional capabilities of construction graduates.

III. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires were developed and collected from 100 students at the CTI, representing multiple scientific departments with various levels of English competence. The initiative questions helped gather valuable insights and measures of students' competencies, perception and experience. All of which are essential for their education and training in the vocational institute. By carefully designing the questionnaires different topics were negotiated including the effectiveness of teaching and training. The data collected from these questionnaires would serve as a foundation for the development of programs, bridging the gaps in teaching and for the ongoing assessments and development of CTI. This allows the educators to tailor their approaches to meet with evolving construction industry workforce.

IV. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

For the first question, “What is your current level in English language?” 103 participants responded. Chart 1 reflects participants’ self-assessment of their current level of English proficiency stating whether they have basic, intermediate, advanced, or fluent level of English. The largest group of respondents with 47.6% considered that they have an intermediate level, while 27.2 % of the respondents stated that they had a basic level of proficiency.16.5% classified themselves as advanced in English language. For the fluent level, only 8.7% of the participants reported that they were fluent. Therefore, only a small portion are fluent or advanced, while the basic and intermediate levels represent a notable proportion of the participants. Therefore, there is a broad range of proficiency within the same group.

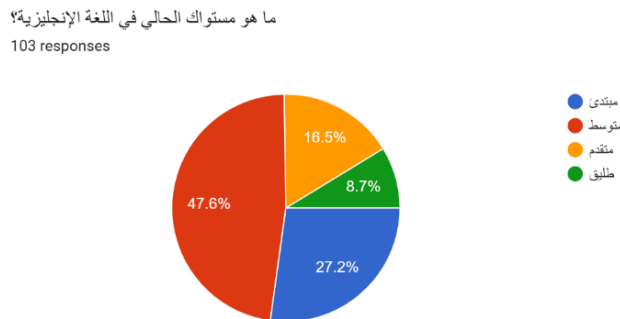


Figure 1: Current level of english language

The second chart illustrates respondents' comfort level in studying complex topics in English, with 104 individuals responding to the 2nd question. The results showed a significant portion of respondents (42.3%) who expressed that they sometimes feel comfortable studying complex subjects in English. On the other hand, 31.7% of respondents indicated that they do not feel comfortable studying complex subjects in English. This highlights a considerable group that likely struggles with advanced language use, which could impact their academic performance or their ability to fully engage with English-based content. On the other hand, 26% of respondents reported feeling comfortable studying complex subjects in English. This group demonstrates a higher degree of language confidence and capability in navigating difficult materials in a second language. This shows that the largest number of respondents are either uncertain or uncomfortable to study complex topics in English.



Figure 2: Comfort level in studying complex topics in English

The third question aimed at respondents' reflection on their experiences with understanding complex concepts taught in English. A total of 104 responses were recorded. 41.3% of the respondents reported that they do not face challenges in understanding complex concepts presented in English, while 34.6% indicated that they face challenges in understanding complex concepts taught in English, therefore hindering their comprehension and engagement with the subject matter. On the other hand, 24% of the respondents reported that they sometimes have problems with understanding complex concepts taught in English Language. The results of question 3 shows that a substantial portion of the respondents (either frequently or sometimes) struggle with comprehension.

هل واجهت أي تحديات في فهم المفاهيم المتعلقة بالبناء التي يتم تدريسها باللغة الإنجليزية؟
104 responses

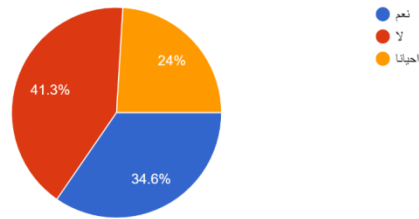


Figure 3: Reflection on experiences with understanding complex concepts taught in English

The data presented in chart 4 reflects the frequency of English language use outside the classroom among respondents. The survey, which included responses of 104 participants, reveals significant insights into the practical application of English in various contexts such as work and personal life. More than half of the respondents (52.9%) indicated that they use English “sometimes” outside the classroom, while 24% of the participants reported that they “never” use English outside their classroom environment. Only 16.3% of respondents indicated that they use English “frequently” outside the classroom. The smallest segment, representing only 6.8% of the respondents, shows that they always English outside the classroom. Overall, the data underscores the varying degrees of English language use among the respondents.

كم مرة تستخدم اللغة الإنجليزية خارج الفصل الدراسي (على سبيل المثال، في العمل أو الحياة الشخصية)؟
104 responses

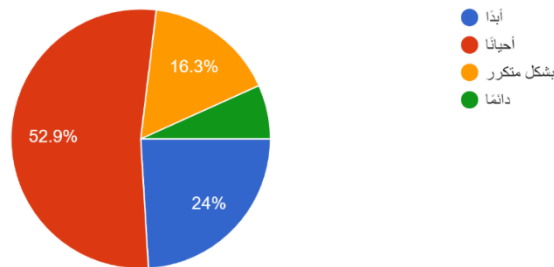


Figure 4: Frequency of English language use outside the classroom

The responses to the fifth question highlight a diverse range of opinions on the impact of studying construction in English on employment opportunities in the global market. 27.9% of the respondents strongly agree that English proficiency in construction studies enhances job prospects, underscoring the perceived value of English as a critical skill for accessing broader employment opportunities and engaging in international projects. Another 27.9% remain neutral, indicating a balanced view or uncertainty about the direct benefits of English proficiency. Meanwhile, 18.3% agree with the positive impact, further supporting the notion that English can be advantageous for career advancement. Conversely, 18.3% disagree, and a smaller segment (7.7%) strongly disagree, suggesting that some individuals do not see English as essential for their professional growth in the construction industry. Overall, the data reflects a general recognition of the importance of English, although opinions vary regarding the perceived degree of importance that English language plays in career advancement.

هل تعتقد أن تعلم البناء باللغة الإنجليزية سيزيد من فرص توظيفك في السوق العالمية؟

104 responses

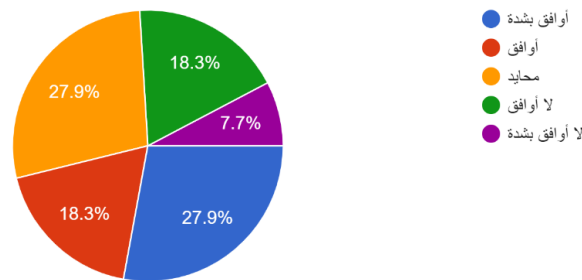


Figure 5: Impact of studying construction in English

The pie chart in Figure 6 illustrates the responses to the question: “How do you rate the quality of learning materials (textbooks, videos, etc.) provided in English compared to those provided in your native language?” A total of 104 responses were collected. 38.5% of the respondents indicated that the quality of English learning materials is the same as those in their native language. Following this, 21.2% of respondents rated the English materials as “Slightly Better” than those presented in mother language. 10.6% rated them as “Much better,” therefore indicating perceived higher quality or better accessibility of resources in English. Interestingly, 18.3% of respondents found the quality to be “slightly worse,” indicating that for a portion of the population, the language of the material does not significantly affect their perception of quality, showing that they have access to high-quality resources in mother language. On the other hand, 11.5% of respondents rated the English materials as “much worse.” These results highlight the diverse perceptions of learning material quality based on language.

كيف تقيم جودة مواد التعلم (الكتب الدراسية، مقاطع الفيديو، الخ) المقدمة باللغة الإنجليزية مقارنة بالمواد المقدمة بلغتك الأم؟

104 responses

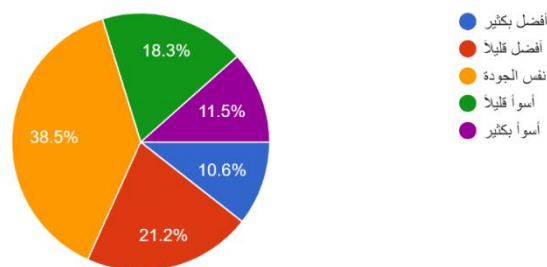


Figure 6: Quality of learning materials provided in English language

The pie chart in Figure 7 illustrates the responses to the question: “Do you think teaching students in specialized construction institutes in English helps them access more international resources and knowledge?” Among the 104 responses that were collected, 50% of the respondents indicated “Yes,” suggesting a strong belief that English instruction enhances access to international resources. On the other hand, 28.8% were “Not Sure,” reflecting uncertainty or mixed opinions about the benefits of English instruction in accessing international resources. 21.2% responded with “No,” so they do not see English as a crucial factor for accessing international resources.

هل تعتقد أن تدريس الطلاب في المعاهد المتخصصة في البناء باللغة الإنجليزية يساعدهم على الوصول إلى المزيد من الموارد والمعرفة الدولية؟
104 responses

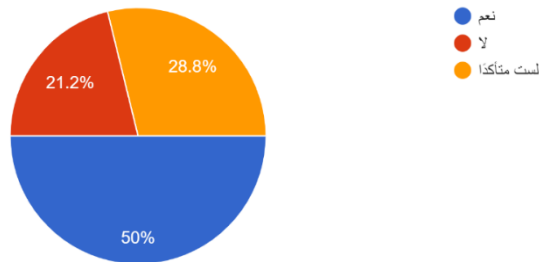


Figure 7: Teaching students in specialized construction institutes in English

The 8th question of the questionnaire navigated the areas that the participants found most challenging while studying in English Language, illustrated by the bar graph below and based on responses from 104 participants. The categories assessed include technical terms and vocabulary, understanding instructions, participating in discussions, reading textbooks, and writing assignments. The most significant challenge identified was with technical terms and vocabulary, affecting 53.8% of respondents. This indicates that a majority of students struggle with the specialized language used in their studies, which can hinder their overall comprehension and academic performance. The second most common challenge indicated by 32.7% of students was the difficulty in participating in discussions, highlighting a barrier to active engagement and communication in an academic setting. The third most common challenge was understanding instructions, reported by 26% of the participants. This suggests that students may find it difficult to follow guidelines and directives given in English, which could impact their ability to complete tasks accurately. Reading textbooks was a challenge for 24% of the respondents which points to difficulties in processing and comprehending written academic material. Lastly, 18.3% of students reported challenges in writing assignments which reflects issues with expressing ideas clearly and coherently in written form.

ما هي المجالات التي وجدت فيها أكبر تحديات أثناء الدراسة باللغة الإنجليزية؟
104 responses

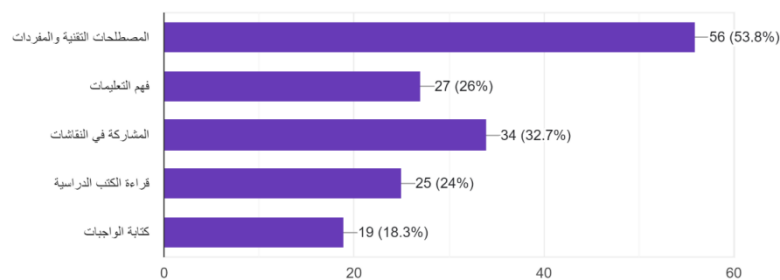


Figure 8: Challenges while studying English language

The 9th question “Do you think institutes should provide more language support to students in construction programs?” was answered by 104 participants, and the responses were divided into three categories, as represented in the chart below. The largest segment, represented in blue, indicated that 50% of respondents believe that additional language support is necessary, suggesting a strong consensus among students on the need for enhanced language assistance to better cope with the demands of their academic programs. The second segment, shown in orange, accounts for 32.7% of the responses. These participants feel that while additional language support is somewhat necessary, it may not be as critical as perceived by the majority. The smallest segment, depicted in gray, represents 17.3% of respondents who do not see the need for additional language support. However, the results show that a significant proportion of the participants believe in the need for language support in construction learning institutes.

هل تعتقد أنه ينبغي على المعاهد تقديم المزيد من الدعم اللغوي للطلاب في برامج البناء؟
104 responses

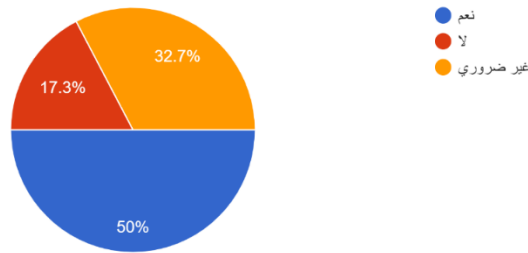


Figure 9: Opinion about language support

Question 10 was to find out if the participants prefer a bilingual training program, including English language and native language. More than half of the respondents (52.9%) prefer a bilingual training program, indicating a significant interest in having training materials available in both English and their native language. However, the close split in responses, with 47.1% of participants indicating no preference for a bilingual program, suggests that a substantial portion of the population is comfortable with training in a single language.

هل تفضل برنامجًا ثنائي اللغة (الإنجليزية ولغتك الأم) في التدريبات؟
104 responses

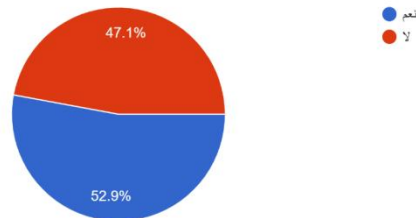


Figure 10: Preference of participants

Question 11 investigated whether they think that studying in English language enhances communication with construction professionals from other countries. The results indicate that a significant proportion of respondents (35.6%) strongly agree that studying in English enhances their ability to communicate with international professionals, suggesting a strong perceived benefit of English language education in fostering global communication skills, while 24% also agree that studying in English improves communication with international professionals. 19.2% of the responses were neutral, on the other hand, 12.5% said that they “disagree,” and only 8.7% responded with “strongly disagree.” These findings highlight the general consensus on the positive impact of English language education for enhancing communication with international construction professionals, while also acknowledging the diverse perspectives and experiences among the respondents.

في رأيك، هل يساعد الدراسة باللغة الإنجليزية في تحسين قدرتك على التواصل مع المهنيين من دول أخرى؟
104 responses

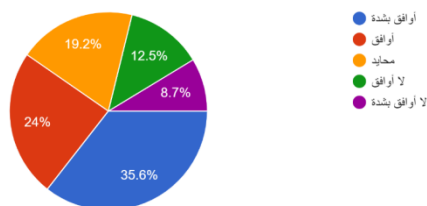


Figure 11: English language and communication

V. CONCLUSION

CTI faces several challenges when teaching technical subjects in English. These challenges as sought through the research and the findings of the results are language proficiency, cultural differences, curriculum development, and resource availability. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy that considers the diverse needs of students and the evolving landscape of technical education. Investigating language assisting programs with culturally responsive and applicable methods, and up-to-date curricula, CTI will establish a fundamental learning method to improve students learning methods and experience, and will therefore be able to equip students for their selected careers.

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