

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Integrating TPACK into ESP curriculum design for the Malaysian TVET beautician course: A qualitative inquiry with TVET trainers

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Abstract – English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is increasingly central to employability in Malaysia's beauty and wellness sector, where service encounters with multilingual clients demand fluent, domain-specific communication. This qualitative study investigates how the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework can guide ESP curriculum design for the Beautician course in Malaysian TVET. Semi-structured interviews with eight experienced beautician trainers were thematically analysed to explore (i) perceived ESP needs, (ii) technology pedagogy content integration, (iii) situated teaching strategies, and (iv) recommendations for curriculum enhancement. Findings indicate strong convergence on industry aligned communicative events such as consultation, explanation of procedures, product recommendation, after-care, complaint handling, purposeful use of video and online resources to model procedural English, and role-play or live demonstration as authentic contexts for language in practice. These technologies were predominantly used for modelling procedural language, practicing through recorded demonstrations and reflective feedback of trainees' communicative activities. The researchers propose a practical ESP TPACK Situated Learning integration model and offer design principles for syllabus developers, trainer, educators, and policymakers.

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1. Introduction

At the start of the 21st century, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) underwent a major paradigm shift, moving from simple skills transfer to competence-based structures that emphasise digital literacy, employability, and communication alongside technical knowledge (Dou, 2023; Schmid et al., 2024). This shift directly aligns with Malaysia's national TVET empowerment agendas, which aim to produce globally competitive graduates by placing heavy emphasis on combined cognitive, interpersonal, and communicative abilities (Yahaya & Miskam, 2020). Nowhere is this interactive competence more critical than in the highly customer-driven beauty and wellness industries. Beyond executing technical procedures flawlessly, beauticians must constantly engage with clients, handling everything from initial consultations and contraindication checks to aftercare advice and complaint management (Prabhasanti et al., 2024).

In urban salons catering to multilingual and international clientele, these routine occupational practices are conducted primarily in English, directly impacting customer satisfaction and business credibility (Padmawati et al., 2021). Despite this highly interactive occupational reality, English instruction in many TVET institutions remains stubbornly generic, focusing heavily on isolated grammar and general proficiency rules. While this equips students with theoretical knowledge, it leaves them unequipped for the pragmatic, context-heavy discourse of the real world. Malaysian employers frequently note that standard linguistic proficiency is not enough; effective job performance requires the ability to communicate appropriately and fluently in specific service encounters (Ting et al., 2017). To close this persistent gap, TVET increasingly champions English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which integrates language learning directly into authentic, performance-related training scenarios rather than treating it as an isolated discipline (Mohamed et al., 2023; Tee et al., 2022).

Drawing from the principles of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), TPACK, and situated learning, effective vocational language teaching ultimately relies on a careful balance of communicative demands, pedagogical techniques, and relevant technology. Crucially, digital devices do not improve learning outcomes on their own; their value is unlocked only when they support authentic disciplinary practices and genuine student engagement, a reality supported by recent evidence showing that cultural and pedagogical coherence matters far more than technology alone (Schmid et al., 2024; Hong et al., 2025). In beautician training, this means language learning must be seamlessly woven into hands-on routines through didactically guided, tech-supported measures. However, despite these clear theoretical benefits, empirical research exploring how Malaysian beauty trainers actually utilise TPACK practices to foster English competence remains scarce. This conceptual gap serves as the driving justification for the present study, which investigates trainers' perspectives and real-world practices regarding ESP, pedagogy, and technology integration. In response to these concerns, the current study aims to explore how English communication can be effectively incorporated into beautician training through interpersonal technologies supported by ESP (English for Specific Purposes) instruction and activities. More specifically, the research focuses on the following:

1. What are beautician trainers' views regarding ESP requirements for the course?

2. To what extent do trainers implement TPACK in their curriculum design and delivery?
3. What embedded pedagogies situated English within job training?
4. How do trainers suggest better tracking of ESP–TPACK linkage?

1.1 ESP in TVET as Beauty Context

At its core, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is built on the principle that language learning should be driven by the specific context and practical needs of the learner. This requires a thorough needs analysis to identify the exact real-life tasks, genres, and communication practices students will encounter in their future careers (Widodo, 2016; Macalister & Nation, 2019). Within Vocational Education and Training (VET), this targeted alignment ensures that language learning serves as a practical vehicle for occupational performance rather than just an abstract academic exercise.

In beauty and wellness training, communication is deeply woven into daily service routines. During consultations, beauticians must confidently explain treatments, manage potential complications, recommend products, and use interpersonal skills, like politeness and deference, to navigate client relationships. Because these interactions require highly specific language, research shows that beauty students benefit far more from task-based salon simulations than from generic English exercises (Padmawati et al., 2021; Prabhasanti et al., 2024). Unfortunately, mass-market textbooks often overlook these nuanced needs in favour of generic topics, leaving trainees technically competent but unprepared for real-world workplace interactions. This gap is particularly clear in Malaysian TVET institutions, where research shows that students feel significantly more confident when taught using authentic workplace scenarios (Yahaya & Miskam, 2024). This aligns with the expectations of industry employers, who prioritise pragmatic interpersonal skills and accurate communication over general language proficiency during service encounters (Ting et al., 2017). Recent local evidence by Tee et al. (2022) confirms this, showing that beauty therapy students who practised with consultation role-plays and simulation activities were far more communicatively ready than those who received standard general English instruction. Ultimately, these findings underscore that beautician ESP must be rooted in authentic vocational events and integrate language learning seamlessly into professional performance.

1.2 TPACK for Skill- based Teaching of English

The integration of digital technologies in vocational language education has been facilitated within the framework of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), conceived by Mishra and Koehler (2006). Effective teaching, according to TPACK, is an intentional meeting place of three integrated domains: subject matter (what gets taught), pedagogy (how it's taught), and technology (tools that facilitate learning). The framework does not view technology as an appendage or add-on, but rather as a set of strategic tools that enable and support instruction in ways consistent with discipline-specific ways of knowing. Whereby technology is a mediating force that amplifies pedagogy and content rather than being left to operate as its own entity. This analysis is even more salient in TVET education, where learning is essentially practical and performance-related. Tools must be selected not for what is new-fangled, but for where they can scaffold authentic task deployment, practice and feedback. Recent reconfigurations of the TPACK framework for TVET, such as discipline-oriented extensions like N-TPACK, highlight the need to carefully consider trade-specific constraints and opportunities and to examine how workplace practices and industry norms dictate instructional choices (Torggler et al., 2023). Empirical reviews likewise indicate that technology only makes a difference to learning outcomes when integrated into sound pedagogical designs through teacher expertise, rather than in the case of superficial or tool-based use (Kholid et al., 2023; Schmid et al., 2024).

The significance of TPACK in the context of ESP education for trainee beauticians is that language learning can be related to occupational practice. Digital materials such as video modelling, pre-recorded demonstrations, and practice with feedback enable a trainee to practise professional communication while performing technical procedures. These examples show how technology provides a means for demonstration, reflection on and refinement of service-oriented talk. As a result, TPACK-informed practices situate English teaching within real TVET tasks, thereby strengthening general employability skills, including collaboration, adaptability, and digital literacy, as these skills become more prominent in Malaysian TVET policies (Yahaya & Miskam, 2024). Substantially, TPACK offers a sensible theoretical framework for examining how technological tools, pedagogical strategies, and ESP content knowledge are interconnected in beauty education. Accordingly, this provides the ideal theoretical basis for analysing how trainers make curriculum design choices in the current investigation.

1.3 Integrating Situated Learning into ESP Curriculum Design

The theory of situated learning, pioneered by Lave and Wenger (1991), provides a powerful framework for integrating English instruction with vocational training. At its core, this theory suggests that learning is far more effective when students engage in authentic activities within a professional community rather than absorbing abstract knowledge in isolation. Within TVET education, this approach shifts the focus from traditional, classroom-based knowledge transmission to the actual workplace as the primary site of learning. For beauty and skincare trainees, this means language is never learned for its own sake; instead, it is acquired naturally as an essential component of service delivery. By utilising role-plays, live demonstrations, and realistic client-staff interactions, students develop their technical skills and professional vocabulary in tandem, thereby significantly improving the transferability of these communication skills to real-world salons (Widodo, 2016). This overlap between technical mastery and communication has direct, practical

implications for how vocational programs are designed. An effective ESP curriculum should be deeply grounded in the actual discourse of the workplace, moving away from mass-market textbooks and generic language exercises toward the functional, service-oriented encounters trainees will face daily (Macalister & Nation, 2019). In the beauty industry, this requires a curriculum focused heavily on consultations, procedure explanations, aftercare advice, and conflict resolution. These high-stakes interactions require not just technical jargon but also vital pragmatic skills such as politeness, empathy, and professional decorum. As Malaysian employers frequently note, strong interpersonal communication is a core employability skill, making it vital that curriculum content directly reflects these real-world workplace expectations (Ting et al., 2017).

To successfully bridge theory and practice, English must be seamlessly woven into technical modules rather than treated as a standalone subject. Trainees should consistently practice their language skills during activity-based tasks that closely mirror standard salon routines. Crucially, this integrated approach must also extend to evaluation practices; performance-based assessments should be used to test both technical accuracy and communicative effectiveness simultaneously. Maintaining this tight alignment between curriculum goals, daily instruction, and final assessment is essential for ensuring that ESP remains a core pillar of vocational competence rather than a superficial add-on (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2021).

2. Methodology

Guided by a constructivist paradigm and an interpretivist lens, this qualitative exploratory study investigates beautician trainers' perceptions and practices regarding the integration of ESP under the Code of Practice for TVET Programme Accreditation (COPTPA). The study utilises the Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) to analyse how digital tools, pedagogy, and language content interact, ensuring conceptual coherence between theory and data analysis. Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews and document triangulation. Semi-structured interviews combined structure with open-ended flexibility, allowing participants to share their professional insights in their own words (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). To corroborate these accounts, document triangulation was conducted on institutional curriculum artefacts, including course outlines, the COPTPA syllabus, weekly schemes of work, lesson plans, and assessment rubrics (Table 1). These documents were analysed to verify the presence of workplace-simulation tasks—such as consultation talk, procedure explanations, and aftercare advice, thereby aligning the trainers' reported instructional practices with official curricular benchmarks.

Table 1

Document triangulation focus

Document Source	Cross-check Focus	Evidence Sought
COPTPA English module syllabus	ESP outcomes & service discourse	Consultation, explanation, after-care and complaint language
Scheme of work / Weekly plan	Task implementation	Role-play, simulation, demo narration, and language-in-practice tasks
Assessment artefacts (Rubric/Task)	Alignment of assessment	Dual criteria: technical quality and communicative adequacy
Teaching notes / Lesson plans	Technology-mediated pedagogy (TPACK)	Use of videos/recordings/tutorials for modelling and feedback

Using alternative research designs, such as surveys, may yield objective evidence, but they do not fully capture the subtle, contextual strategies of TVET trainers. Qualitative exploration remains essential for capturing the rich, lived experiences of beauty trainers as English is integrated into their technical training. This approach aligns with previous ESP and TVET research emphasising the need for context-bound investigations of communication practices and curriculum integration (Dou, 2023; Prabhasanti et al., 2024). To maintain research quality, standard trustworthiness strategies were carefully employed. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, in which respondents verified summaries of their responses. Dependability was enhanced by a straightforward audit trail for coding and theme development, while transferability was supported by thick descriptions of the institutional and curricular settings. Finally, reflexivity journaling enhanced confirmability by enabling the researcher to actively record and mitigate personal biases (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Together, these actions ensured that the results were reliable and deeply grounded in the context of Malaysian TVET ESP provision.

2.1 Research Context

The study was conducted at two Malaysian TVET institutions that offered the Ministry of Youth and Sports' Beautician Diploma. Both practical and beauty-related facial therapies, make-up, hair care, and communication modules are part of its syllabus. English, however, has traditionally been taught by pre-service teachers in general proficiency courses, creating a gap between professional communicative needs in the workplace and those in a school setting.

2.2 Participants

The purposive sample comprised eight TVET trainers specialising in beauty courses; all had more than five years' teaching experience and delivered skills training in English. Trainers with direct teaching experience in beautician skills and considerable experience integrating English during practicals were purposively sampled. The sample size ($n = 8$) was considered adequate for qualitative inquiry, prioritising depth, contextual insight, and information-rich cases rather than statistical generalisation, in line with qualitative sampling principles. Thematic saturation was considered to have been met when subsequent interviews did not yield new codes or themes of substantive form, and the existing thematic framework had become established across participants. All were women, aged 32 to 49, with 6 to 20 years of work experience, including industry practice and teaching. The selection of respondents in the present study was anticipated to enable the data to be presented as informed opinions from implementers directly involved in translating vocation-related content into ESP learning objectives. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary means of data collection, allowing the trainers to express their views and giving the researcher scope to question interviewees about areas that emerged during discussions. The participants were informed of the purpose and method of the study, as well as their right to withdraw at any stage. Consent was provided in writing, with participants' names and affiliations obscured to preserve confidentiality. The characteristics of the beautician trainers who participated, including teaching experience, qualifications, specialism, and use of English in class, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant demographics

Code	Gender	Years teaching	Highest qualification	Specialism	Use of English in class
T1	F	12	Diploma (Cosmetology) + Teaching Cert	Facial & Spa	60%
T2	F	8	Bachelor (Beauty Science)	Make-up Artistry	50%
T3	F	11	Diploma + Teaching Cert	Hair & Make-up	40%
T4	F	7	Bachelor (Cosmetology Ed.)	Nails	55%
T5	F	15	Diploma + Teaching Cert	Spa Therapy	70%
T6	F	9	Bachelor (Beauty Mgmt.)	Salon Ops	45%
T7	F	6	Diploma (Beauty Therapy)	Facial/Skincare	50%
T8	F	10	Diploma + Teaching Cert	Image Consulting	65%

2.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the mainstay of data collection. Interviews were 45 to 60 minutes in length and took place face-to-face or online, as appropriate, given that they were arranged to accommodate participants' availability. A structured interview protocol was developed around four guiding areas: trainers' needs regarding the beauty shop curriculum, the TPACK framework used and how lessons are taught using it, pedagogical strategies adopted to integrate English into practical training, and recommendations for enhancing the curriculum. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for accuracy, thereby providing a comprehensive network of textual data.

2.4 Data Analysis

For analytical integrity, the thematic analysis was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2021, 2023) reflexive six-step process; familiarisation, initial coding, theme searching, reviewing themes, constructing thematic definitions and reporting. Coding was performed iteratively; themes were derived from the data and then interpreted through the TPACK framework. This approach provided a structured means of increasing transparency, consistency, and the credibility of interpretations, thereby mitigating some concerns regarding the subjective dimension of qualitative enquiry.

As the data largely came from self-reports by trainers, the results should be taken as perceptions of what goes on in practice and of the realities of curricular practice, rather than as objectively observed teaching outcomes or trainee impact. Thus, this study does not posit causal influence, such as "improves communication", but rather reports what trainers felt contributed to trainees' readiness for workplace communication within their local settings. A number of trustworthiness strategies were utilised to enhance the credibility and rigour of the study. Member checking was achieved by sending interpretative summaries to several participants to validate the interpretations. Peer debriefing with academic peers was used to facilitate the convergence of emerging codes and reduce the possibility of researcher bias. A record of coding decisions and theme development was kept to maintain the transparency and reliability of the analysis. Ethics approval

was granted by an ethics committee, and informed consent was obtained from all concerned. All identities were de-identified to ensure anonymity. These measures enhanced the trustworthiness, reliability, and ethical soundness of the research.

2.5 Researcher Positionality

The researcher occupies an insider–practitioner role in the Malaysian TVET ecosystem, having professional experience as an English language teacher who taught ESP and participated in curriculum-related matters in vocational education. This backdrop provided participants with context on TVET institutional cultures, industry communication expectations, and ESP module delivery, thereby establishing rapport and facilitating a more nuanced interpretation of trainers' experiences. Yet, such proximity also risks creating perceptions of bias, leading to common-sense assumptions, and overemphasising interpretations from participants' perspectives. Various reflexive and procedural protections were used to guard against these influences. Peer debriefing with other academic colleagues continued throughout the analysis to mitigate the impact of assumptions and interpretations. A process audit trail was maintained throughout coding decisions, theme construction, and analytical thinking to provide transparency and dependability. Reflexive memoing also bracketed the researcher's prior assumptions and separated participant accounts from personal expectancy. These methods served to increase confirmability and reduce the extent to which the data were rooted in the narratives rather than in the researchers.

3. Results

The results reveal that beauty teachers believe ESP is essential for trainees in client interactions. Trainers often stressed that it was not only additional but also key to service provision in the beauty sector in consultation settings, especially for product explanations and responding to complaints. Throughout the interviews, trainers reported that English was essential for service provision, especially when beauticians consulted with customers about desired services, explained products, or addressed complaints. Trainers also noted that the general English syllabus does not adequately prepare learners for the beauty industry's jargon. This is consistent with the findings of Padmawati et al. (2021), who also showed in their needs analysis in a beauty programme that students needed focused materials on industry-specific lexical items and interactional strategies. More recently, Prabhasanti et al. (2024) reconfirmed this in Indonesia by demonstrating that beauty students required communication materials directly related to salon activities, supporting the need for individualised ESP syllabi. Thus, trainers in this study reiterate the literature's plea for needs-based curriculum development (Macalister & Nation, 2019).

3.1 Trainers' Perceptions of ESP Needs

Regarding the functionality of Communicative English in Beautician Language, all the trainers opined that beauticians need communicative English to interact with their clients, not only for consultation but also for treatment explanations, product recommendations, aftercare instructions, and handling customer complaints. English speaking as a sign of professionalism in urban salons for expats or tourists, training providers mentioned that their customers see English communication as a sign of professionalism;

"Our students can do the facial perfectly, but if they cannot explain all that in English, the customer might feel doubtful. English is now seen as a service quality." (Trainer 4)

This is in line with Yahaya and Miskam (2024), who found that vocational students reported being unprepared to use workplace-specific discourse due to general English syllabi. It supports the claim that ESP curricula are based on needs analysis as a source of information (Macalister & Nation, 2019).

3.2 Application of TPACK in Curriculum Delivery

The trainers explained their attempts to integrate English training with practical beauty modules using the TPACK framework. For instance, trainees were often required to write up how they would carry out a procedure in English, using digital resources such as instructional videos or slides. This approach aligns with Mishra and Koehler's (2006) framework for effective teaching, which considers content, pedagogy, and technology as interconnected.

The results indicate a discrepancy in trainers' digital literacy, which affects their competence in implementing TPACK effectively. Some teachers primarily used traditional demonstration methods, while others used digital glossaries and online tutorials. This result is also corroborated by Nepembe (2023) in Namibia, who observed that vocational trainers face challenges with the consistent application of TPACK due to poor infrastructure. The same was concluded in the meta-analytic review by Schmid et al. (2024), which found that TPACK is, from a theoretical perspective, relatively widely acknowledged but, in practice, not commonly evident in the use of technology in occupational education, suggesting a need for professional development. It is interesting how the trainers mentioned that their training was, although implicitly, also informed by vocational NTPACK models for vocational education and training, as described by Torggler et al. (2023), and applied to one's workplace within the strengthening of workplace practice orientation TPACK-broader model. These findings indicate that while the beautician trainers interviewed do not overtly follow these models, they are moving towards more contextualised examples of digital pedagogy integration.

3.3 Situated Pedagogies in Embedding English

The findings further showed that trainers implemented situated learning to enable the incorporation of English into beauty training. Role-plays of client consultations and complaint-handling scenarios, along with an oral presentation featuring a treatment demonstration, were typical activities presented. These pedagogical approaches are reminiscent of Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, in which individuals become members through engaging in real-world tasks. Participants identified these simulations as offering a structured (rehearsal) space through which to practise sequencing service talk, such as welcoming, consulting, reassuring, and aftercare, alongside technical practice. This aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021, 2023) perspective that reflexive thematic analysis is valuable in capturing the contextual nuance of such practices, as trainers adapt classroom methods to mirror workplace realities. In practice, role-play and simulation helped reduce trainees' anxiety about speaking English by providing low-risk rehearsal spaces. These findings corroborate those of Padmawati et al. (2021) and Prabhasanti et al. (2024), who also observed that embedding English in beauty tasks makes communication training more meaningful and directly transferable to professional contexts.

3.4 Industry-aligned ESP Needs

All trainers emphasised that the syllabus must be built from real service encounters: client greeting and rapport, needs analysis and contraindications, step-by-step explanations, product recommendations or upselling with cautions, aftercare and follow-up, and complaint handling. Representative quotes:

"They can perform a facial but hesitate to explain what and why in English; that's the gap our curriculum must close." (T3)

"We need functional language like Would you mind closing your eyes? You may feel slight tingling, and polite complaint handling." (T7)

The trainers believed that successful ESP training would provide trainees with complete interactional routines that included one or more parts of a service encounter, such as opening, explanation, reassurance, and closing. This implies that language requirements extend beyond learning vocabulary to include the ability to navigate service-based conversations coherently and in a customer-oriented manner. Taken together, such findings suggest that, for trainers, ESP is an intrinsically functional and service-bound notion within authentic working contexts, rather than a declarative or decoupled form of language knowledge.

3.5 Purposeful Technology Integration via TPACK

Trainers reported using video modelling, recorded demos with English narration, curated professional tutorials to mine vocabulary or discourse, and simple practice recordings for self or peer feedback. A few used interactive slide decks and LMS tasks; none reported heavy dependence on high-end simulations, but several expressed interest;

"When students watch their own demo with English narration, they notice hesitations and vocabulary gaps, it pushes deliberate practice." (T5)

Technology use was described across interviews in relation to specific pedagogical purposes, such as modelled instruction, rehearsal, and feedback, rather than as a separate instructional entity. Trainers indicated that the digital tools were chosen for their convenience and usefulness to salon processes, so that language learning could take place alongside procedural knowledge. Altogether, these results illustrate the perception of technology as a mediating, literal tool for pedagogy, content, and language integration in vocational education contexts, demonstrating an emerging pragmatic approach to implementing TPACK in beautician training. Crucially, it was noted that the technologies were chosen for their value as tools in use rather than for their complexity. Video recording and narrated demonstrations were selected as tools for several reasons, including the ability to observe language use alongside procedural performance and to engage in reflective self-assessment. This suggests that technology served as a pedagogical scaffold for enhancing communicative skills rather than as an autonomous teaching component. Such intentional positioning constitutes an authentic realisation of TPACK concepts in TVET ESP environments.

3.6 Situated Pedagogies for Authentic Performance

Pedagogies were consistently language in practice; demo-narration speaking the procedure while performing, rotating client–consultant role-plays with checklists that capture safety and communication, and salon floor simulations;

"We run 'English-only' service simulations. They prepare a consultation card, do the treatment, and give after-care, all in English." (T2)

Trainers in all interviews emphasised that frequent practice of these situated tasks helped the learners overcome their reluctance to use English and feel more at ease speaking in an English-speaking client context. Real performance contexts allowed trainees to rehearse language options, tone, and sequence in ways that were immediately relevant to work-context performance. In conclusion, these data suggest that English learning is achieved through participation in authentic vocational tasks, thereby enabling the simultaneous development of communicative competence and technical proficiency within the context of beautician training.

3.7 Curriculum Enhancement through Materials and Authentic Assessment

Trainers requested contextualised resources, local service menus, consultation forms, consent sheets, bilingual scaffolds that phase to English-dominant and dual-criteria rubrics, technical quality with communicative adequacy. They also recommended periodic industry calibration to refresh treatment vocabulary and service protocols;

“Our materials are too generic. We need Malaysian salon scenarios, not just global YouTube content.” (T8)

The trainers suggested regularly scheduled industry calibration to review instructional content and evaluation criteria for congruence with emerging treatment parlance, service procedures, and client preferences. This included revising role-play scenarios, lists of terminology, and descriptions of assessments in alignment with industry practice. Taken together, these findings suggest that trainers perceive a need for closer alignment of ESP content, authentic service-related tasks, and evaluative practices that provide opportunities for trainees to display language in use as part of actual vocational performance, rather than being limited to isolated classroom activities. The primary themes, illustrative quotes and their curricular implications are summarised in Table 3. Drawing on the identified themes, an ESP-TPACK-Situated Learning integration model is also developed to frame how English-language learning resources and practices intersect within a beautician program. As Figures 1 and 2 show, ESP outputs are nested within real salon communicative events, with mediating purposeful technology use and situated pedagogies that serve to develop both technical and communicative proficiency.

Table 3

Thematic framework with illustrative quotes and implications

Theme	Illustrative quote	Curriculum implication
Industry-aligned ESP	“Students can do the treatment but struggle to explain it in English.” (T3)	Derive syllabus from communicative events: consultation, procedure explanation, after-care, complaints.
TPACK-driven Tech Use	“Watching their own narrated demo reveals gaps.” (T5)	Select tech that serves modelling/feedback; embed vocabulary/discourse in technique videos.
Situated Pedagogies	“English-only service simulations build confidence.” (T2)	Demo-narration and role-plays as routine; use checklists combining safety + communication.
Materials and Assessment	“We need local ESP materials and rubrics for both skill and English.” (T8)	Develop Malaysian salon artefacts; implement dual-criteria, performance-based assessment.

Figure 1

ESP-TPACK-situated learning integration model

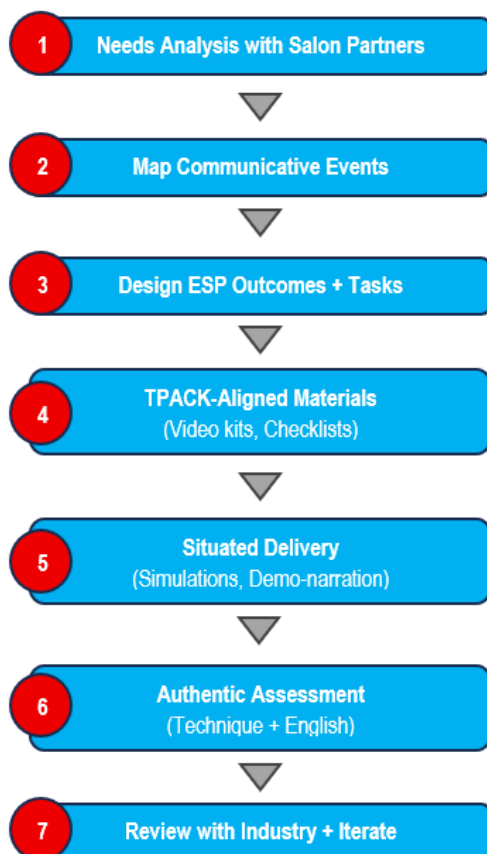
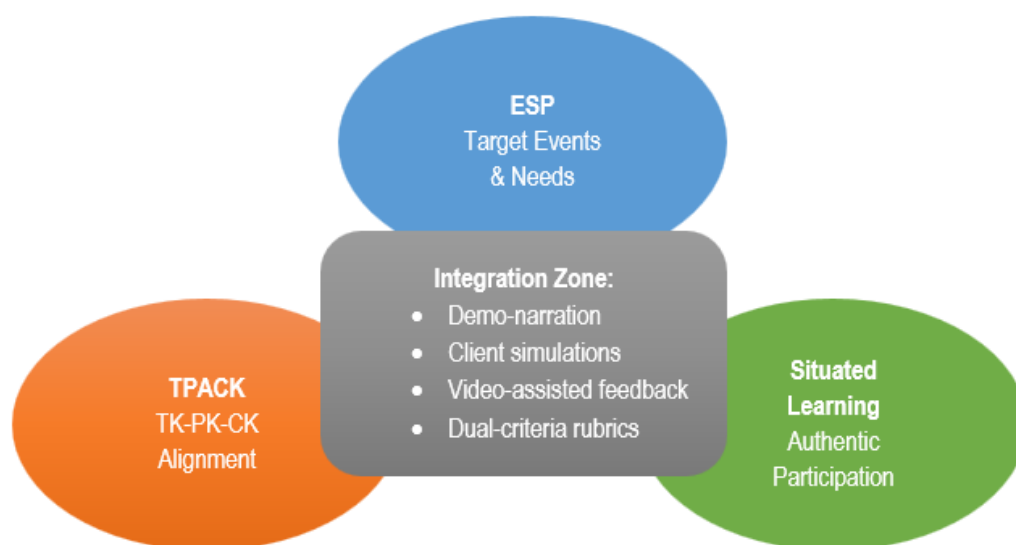


Figure 2

ESP-TPACK-situated learning integration model



4. Discussion

The study has investigated how ESP can be integrated into beautician education through pedagogical design, topical content, and technology, as realised in TPACK (Mishra and Koehler 2006), and supported by situated learning perspectives. The results are consistent with Malaysian evidence indicating that TVET graduates may be technically competent yet have difficulty communicating at a professional level, especially in client-facing situations (Tee et al., 2022; Kho & Ting, 2023). On the whole, these findings add weight to the argument that TVET language planning practice should move beyond general competence benchmarks and aim for occupationally embedded communication practices in service-related fields, where communication quality can directly impact service delivery outcomes and employability. Rather than translating technology or pedagogy as “effective” (or not), the analysis here centres on what trainers’ viewpoints can tell us about curriculum design priorities, constraints, and alignment mechanisms in Malaysian TVET beautician education. So, each subsection is prefaced by an interpretation and synthesis, tying the findings to the existing literature and explicating the implications for ESP–TPACK curriculum development.

4.1 ESP as Employability Capital in Client-Facing TVET

This finding suggests that English functions as a form of employability capital within client-facing TVET contexts, rather than as an auxiliary or supplementary skill. In the beauty and wellness sector, work readiness is not limited to technical skills; it also includes conducting client assessments, explaining procedures and associated risks, making ethical product recommendations, and addressing complaints professionally through effective interpersonal communication. Such communicative practices are embedded in service delivery, and meaningful interaction directly translates into trust and satisfaction among clients. Supporting evidence in context is provided by the Malaysian experience, which has shown through empirical investigation that communicative competence, especially in terms of context-specific spoken interaction skills, is regarded as a core, host employability capability, language ability, at least in employers’ perceptions (Ting et al., 2017). Likewise, research in Malaysian TVET environments reveals that employers anticipate their graduates to have integrated employability competencies, with communication skills and interpersonal effectiveness, as well as workplace readiness, being integral dimensions of vocational performance (Nayan, 2024).

In addition, this finding further extends existing ESP–TVET scholarship by demonstrating that the provision of general English remains structurally misaligned with the demands of occupation-specific discourse. In TVET areas such as beautician training, the underlying communication is situated within process- and service-driven interactions that demand highly contextualised language use. Previous research in beauty industry education underscores the strong demand for comparative instructional materials, such as consultation scripts, complaint-solving procedures, and aftercare explanations, that reflect authentic service experiences and cannot be addressed by a typical English syllabus (Padmawati et al., 2021; Prabhasanti et al., 2024). Research conducted in Malaysia also corroborates this view, with learners viewing English as an essential tool for preparation and work-related communication (Yahaya & Miskam, 2024). More broadly, contemporary analyses indicate that employability increasingly depends on discipline-specific communication skills rather than general linguistic competence (Shuib, 2015).

From a curriculum perspective, these findings highlight that ESP in beautician education should be regarded as a core occupational competency, on a par with technical training components. This is because service delivery in the beauty industry is fundamentally communicative, as practitioners must negotiate their language use in real time when applying procedural knowledge with clients. This positioning aligns with global TVET policy frameworks that emphasise communication as a transversal competency to be developed alongside technical expertise, thereby preparing the

workforce more holistically (UNESCO–UNEVOC, 2023). Consequently, embedding ESP within vocational curricula is not merely desirable but necessary to bridge the gap between training provision and industry expectations.

4.2 Interpreting TPACK as “Pedagogical Rationale”, Not “Technological Use”

This finding suggests that TPACK in beautician ESP contexts should be understood primarily as a pedagogical rationale rather than as the mere use of technology. This likely explains why trainers report choosing digital tools not for their novelty but for their potential to support specific instructional purposes, such as modelling, rehearsal, feedback, and reflective practice. From this perspective, technology serves as a mediating tool that enriches pedagogical intentions rather than being an isolated part of teaching. This interpretation aligns with the foundational premise of TPACK, which emphasises the purposeful integration of content, pedagogy, and technology to support meaningful learning, rather than the superficial adoption of digital tools (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This finding further highlights that variability in TPACK implementation within TVET is shaped less by individual willingness and more by systemic and contextual constraints. The differences in trainers’ use of technology mirror disparities in institutional infrastructure, access to digital resources, and opportunities for professional development. Previous research suggests that meaningful TPACK integration presupposes long-term institutional support, which is not taken for granted, particularly in TVET settings that may lack access to technology and pedagogical methods (Kholid et al., 2023; Schmid et al., 2024). Other studies within TVET contexts found that a lack of robust digital infrastructure and inadequate training can hinder the effective implementation of technology-mediated pedagogy (Dou, 2023; Nepembe, 2023). As a result, trainers usually seek pragmatic, low-threshold technological practices that fit the immediate needs of their classrooms rather than complex or resource-intensive innovations.

From a broader analytical perspective, this finding extends current TPACK discourse by positioning it as a form of curriculum design logic within ESP-oriented TVET environments. Instead of treating technology as an ancillary component, trainers seem to translate TPACK into their practice by embedding language use in vocational tasks such as narrating demonstrations of work processes, recording role-plays and giving structured feedback. This interpretation aligns with recent extensions of TPACK in vocational education, such as the N-TPACK model, which highlights the need to integrate technology to address specific practices and workplace realities within their trade (Torggler et al., 2023). Therefore, the effective implementation of TPACK in beautician ESP requires context-sensitive adaptation, supported by targeted professional development and adequate institutional resources to sustain meaningful pedagogical integration.

4.3 Situated Pedagogies as a Mechanism for Transfer

This finding suggests that situated pedagogies function as a critical mechanism for facilitating the transfer of language learning into workplace practice within TVET contexts. Rather than being mere lessons, for example, consulting role-plays, live demonstrations and client-interaction rehearsals allow trainees to partake in genuine communicative practices that approximate professional situations. Within these practices, the use of English becomes embedded in vocational tasks, enabling learners to develop communicative competence as part of their technical performance. This interpretation aligns with situated learning theory, which posits that knowledge and competence develop through active participation in communities of practice and real-world contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This finding further extends ESP pedagogical discourse by demonstrating that effective training in beauty contexts requires engagement at the level of discourse, not merely vocabulary acquisition. For example, trainees are not only learning what to say but also how to sequence their explanations, deal sensitively with personal interactions during periods of client contact, like consultations and complaints. These discursive competencies can only be honed through genuine, interaction-based practice rather than through decontextualised language drilling. This perspective is consistent with ESP literature, which emphasises the importance of needs-based design and task authenticity in vocational language learning (Widodo, 2016). Empirical studies in beauty education similarly demonstrate that role-play and simulation activities enhance learners’ communicative confidence and preparedness for workplace interactions (Padmawati et al., 2021; Prabhasanti et al., 2024).

From a broader curriculum perspective, these findings indicate that situated pedagogies serve as a pedagogical bridge linking technical proficiency with communicative competence. This links the language used to perform the task to the actual vocational activities, making it clear to trainers how they should expect learners to function in industry. This is in keeping with competency-based TVET frameworks, which recognise that it is not only the technical skills that need to be acquired but also the capacity to express oneself coherently and convincingly within various professional contexts. International employability frameworks also strengthen this perspective by recognising communication as a crucial transferable skill for workplace preparedness (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2021). Consequently, the infusion of situated pedagogies into ESP pedagogy is entirely appropriate to maximise transferability of learning and subsequent employability outcomes.

4.4 Analytically Unpacking the ESP - TPACK Models

This finding suggests that effective curriculum development in beautician ESP requires a clearly articulated structure of alignment, conceptualised here as an “ESP–TPACK linkage,” rather than reliance on individual trainers’ improvisations. Across trainers’ recommendations, some common elements emerged regarding these alignment mechanisms, including the need for localised training materials relevant to a salon’s specific needs; structured industry calibration (check-ins) to

ensure greater relevance; and assessment practices that test communication alongside technical expertise. These elements mirror ideals that inform sound curricular design, particularly treating the meaningfulness of needs, objectives, content and assessment (Macalister & Nation, 2019). Furthermore, this perspective is consistent with Malaysian research demonstrating that industry-oriented English instruction enhances both ESP relevance and workplace preparedness (Yahaya & Miskam, 2024).

This broadens the TPACK-inspired curriculum talk by articulating what it means to have “alignment” in practice for beautician ESP. In analytical senses, what we call ESP–TPACK models in this study can be characterised as:

1. Content of ESP (service discourse): consulting, explaining, recommending a product, after-care, complaint handling;
2. Pedagogical design (situated tasks): role-play, simulation, demonstration narration, feedback cycles, and
3. Technology mediation (low-threshold tools): video modelling, recording for feedback, curated tutorials, simple LMS tasks.

The model counts because it makes clear that the focus should not be on technology as a product of wizardry, but rather on educational purposes and real-service discourse. This reading is consistent with research suggesting that a trainer's effectiveness depends more on coherence among pedagogical actions than on the number of tools implemented (Kholid et al., 2023; Schmid et al., 2024).

From an assessment standpoint, these findings underscore the importance of viewing ESP as central to performance-based evaluation rather than a peripheral or bolted-on component. The pressure on trainers to focus on rubrics, portfolios, and recording simulations reflects the need for an authentic assessment practice that captures not only the technical execution of tasks but also communicative competence in integrated tasks. This resonates with employer expectations in service-oriented industries where communication skills were viewed as fundamental alongside technical ability (Ting et al., 2017). This is further underscored by empirical evidence from the Malaysian TVET context, which consistently points towards innovative assessments involving performance indicators predominantly in the format of presentations, simulations and task-based evaluations as a viable assessment option that accurately reflects learners' preparedness for industry, holding higher correlations as compared to conventional paper-based methods (Mohamed et al., 2023; Tee et al., 2022). Thus, incorporating authentic assessment into this integration through the lens of ESP–TPACK provides an analytical framework to ensure that communication competencies align with vocational certification outcomes by measuring language as integrated into professional performance rather than as an added facet.

4.5 Contribution to Literature

This study contributes to the ESP–TVET literature by extending empirical evidence into the under-researched domain of service-oriented vocational sectors, specifically beautician training. ESP has typically focused on disciplines such as engineering, business management, and hospitality and tourism, with relatively little coverage of the communicative demands encountered in beauty- and wellness-oriented contexts, which are often taken for granted in highly interpersonal, client-facing exchanges. Such discourse practices, consultation, procedural explanation, or complaint-handling reflecting the characteristics of service provision in this sector and their application within the communication parts are varied from other vocational domains. Thus, the study supports the claim that ESP curricula must be genre-based and tied to particular trades rather than transferred generically across fields.

The study thus adds to the literature by providing a localised reading of TPACK as a situated and emergent integration framework in TVET ESP environments. The research found that TPACK does not function as a standard model in practice but rather serves as an expedited, pragmatic instructional logic shaped by institutional conditions and available resources. Trainer's experiences both illustrate the pedagogical potential of TPACK- in particular with reference to modelling and feedback, but also its limitations, especially when it comes to environments mediated by uneven infrastructure and limited professional development opportunities. This contextualised reading is consistent with research on international TVET–TPACK and also adds Malaysian-specific insights into resource constraints and the need for ongoing capacity building (Schmid et al., 2024; Nepembe, 2023).

Ultimately, this research enriches broader discussions on TVET reform by reinforcing the need for a comprehensive vision for employability development that uses competencies as the common denominator. The results present ESP not as a marginal entity but as one of the most significant occupational competences underlying successful professional communication in service-based spheres. This view is more aligned to global TVET policy frameworks that highlight the inclusion of skills such as communication, digital capability and interpersonal competence alongside technical training (UNESCO–UNEVOC, 2023). In conclusion, this study provides an evidence-based justification for improving ESP–TPACK convergence in beautician education through authentic tasks, pedagogy-driven use of technology and performance-oriented assessment practices.

5. Conclusion

This study explores how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be integrated into the Malaysian TVET beautician curriculum, using situated learning and the TPACK framework to examine trainers' experiences. The findings reveal that English communication is far from a luxury; it is a foundational skill directly tied to professional credibility and high-quality client service. Instead of teaching grammar in isolation, trainers found the most success by embedding language learning into real-world salon simulations—such as client consultations, treatment explanations, and handling complaints.

When paired with digital tools like video modelling and guided narration, this hands-on approach allows students to build speaking confidence and fluency at the exact same time they are mastering their technical beauty skills. Ultimately, the data argue for a curriculum in which language and vocational training are fully intertwined rather than separated. While these insights offer a valuable blueprint for modernising vocational training, the study's small sample size means the results cannot be broadly generalised just yet. Future research would benefit from looking at actual student performance data, gathering feedback from industry employers, and testing these instructional designs on a larger scale. However, the true value of this integrated model stretches far beyond beauty therapy. It provides a highly adaptable framework for any Malaysian TVET field that relies heavily on face-to-face communication, such as hospitality, healthcare assistance, and customer service. Replicating this approach across more institutions could significantly elevate workplace communication standards, giving Malaysian graduates a distinct competitive edge in both the local and global job markets.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

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