

# A Corpus-Based Evaluation of the Efficacy of the Communication in English GST Course in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti for Students Enhanced Communication and Employability

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## Abstract

The transition from tertiary education to the global workforce requires robust communicative competence, a skill set increasingly demanded by employers in the 21st century. In Nigerian universities, General Studies (GST) courses, particularly "Communication in English," are mandated to bridge the gap between students' existing language proficiencies and the rigorous demands of academic and professional environments. This study presents a corpus-based evaluation of the efficacy of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University (EKSU) in enhancing students' communication skills and subsequent employability. Grounded in Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory, the research investigates the extent to which the course curriculum translates into measurable linguistic and pragmatic improvements. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the study compiled a specialised corpus of written and spoken texts produced by EKSU students, post-course completion, so as to analyse the lexical richness, syntactic complexity, and pragmatic appropriateness of the corpus. Quantitative corpus findings were triangulated with qualitative survey data assessing students' self-perceived competence and employability readiness. The results indicated a statistically significant, albeit moderate, improvement in students' formal academic writing and spoken interaction skills. However, the corpus data also revealed persistent deficits in pragmatic adaptability and industry-specific communication tasks. The findings suggest that while the GST course provides foundational linguistic capital, its current pedagogical framework requires strategic realignment with practical, labour-market-driven communication scenarios to fully realise its potential as an investment in human capital. The study concludes with actionable recommendations for curriculum reform and pedagogical innovation in Nigerian Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs).

**Keywords:** Corpus Linguistics, Communication Competence, Human Capital Theory, Employability, English for Academic Purposes

## 1. Introduction

The role of the English language as the primary medium of instruction and global communication cannot be overstated, particularly within the context of higher education in Anglophone Africa. In Nigeria, proficiency in English is not merely an academic requirement but a critical determinant of socio-economic mobility and professional success. As the nation navigates the complexities of a globalised economy, the demand for university graduates who possess exceptional communication skills has intensified. Employers consistently rank effective communication—encompassing both written and spoken modalities—as a paramount competency required for the

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modern workforce (Jackson, 2014:45). Consequently, Nigerian universities have integrated General Studies (GST) courses into their curricula, designed to equip students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds with foundational academic and communicative competencies. Among these, the "Communication in English" course stands as a cornerstone intervention, intended to refine students' linguistic abilities and prepare them for the communicative demands of both their academic pursuits and future careers.

Ekiti State University (EKSU), a prominent state-owned institution in southwestern Nigeria, mandates the "Communication in English" GST course for all incoming undergraduates. The course is structurally designed to enhance reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills, while also fostering effective oral communication. However, despite the institutional commitment to this mandatory pedagogical intervention, a conspicuous gap persists between the successful completion of the course and the actual communicative competence demonstrated by graduates in the labour market. Reports from industry stakeholders and educational researchers frequently highlight a deficiency in the practical communication skills of Nigerian graduates, suggesting that the theoretical knowledge imparted in university classrooms often fails to translate into functional workplace proficiency (Oluwatayo, 2021:112). This persistent dichotomy raises critical questions regarding the pedagogical efficacy, curriculum alignment, and practical utility of the existing GST communication courses.

The problem statement of this research is rooted in the discrepancy between the intended outcomes of the "Communication in English" course and the observable communicative realities of EKSU students. While the course aims to build human capital through language proficiency, it remains unclear whether the current instructional methodologies and assessment frameworks effectively develop the specific communicative competencies required for employability. Traditional evaluations of such courses have often relied heavily on standardised test scores and self-reported surveys, which may not accurately capture the nuances of actual language use in authentic contexts. Therefore, there is a pressing need for an empirical, data-driven evaluation of students' linguistic output to objectively assess the course's impact.

This study addresses this gap by employing a corpus-based methodology to evaluate the efficacy of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University. By compiling and analysing a corpus of student-produced texts, the research aims to provide a granular, objective assessment of students' lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic development. The primary objectives of this study are threefold: first, to empirically evaluate the communicative competence of EKSU students' post-GST course completion using corpus linguistic techniques; second, to assess the students' perceived readiness and employability based on their communication skills; and third, to examine the alignment between the course outcomes and the theoretical postulates of Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory.

To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions: To what extent does the "Communication in English" GST course improve the lexical richness and syntactic complexity of students' written and spoken output? How do students perceive the impact of the course on their overall communicative competence and subsequent employability? In what ways do the empirical corpus findings align with the principles of Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory?

The significance of this study lies in its methodological innovation and theoretical integration. With this corpus linguistics, the research moves beyond subjective evaluations, offering a robust empirical foundation for assessing language course efficacy in a Nigerian university context. Furthermore, by evolving the evaluation within Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of language education not just as an academic exercise, but as a critical investment in students' professional futures. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for curriculum developers, language educators, and educational policymakers, offering data-driven recommendations for enhancing the relevance and impact of GST communication courses in preparing employable, competent graduates for the 21st-century workforce.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in two complementary frameworks: Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory. These theories provide a robust lens through which the efficacy of the "Communication in English" General Studies (GST) course at Ekiti State University (EKSU) can be evaluated, specifically concerning its role in enhancing students' communicative abilities and subsequent employability. With these two theoretical perspectives, this research aims to elucidate the multifaceted impact of language education on both individual cognitive development and broader socio-economic outcomes.

### 2.1 Communication Competence Theory

Communication Competence Theory, extensively developed and formalised by Brian H. Spitzberg, posits that communicative competence is not a singular trait but a complex, multifaceted construct comprising three essential components: knowledge, skill, and motivation (Spitzberg, 1983:324). According to Spitzberg, competent communication is defined as the ability to interact in a manner that is both appropriate and effective within a given relational and situational context. This theoretical model is particularly salient for evaluating language courses, as it moves beyond mere grammatical accuracy to encompassing the functional and pragmatic dimensions of language use.

The first component, knowledge, refers to the cognitive understanding of communication rules, patterns, and expectations. In the context of the "Communication in English" GST course, knowledge encompasses the students' grasp of English syntax, vocabulary, discourse structures, and the sociolinguistic norms appropriate for academic and professional settings. It involves understanding what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. The course curriculum is designed to impart this foundational knowledge, equipping students with the theoretical understanding necessary for effective communication (Littlejohn, 1982:115).

The second component, skill, is the behavioural manifestation of knowledge. It is the actual ability to execute communication behaviours effectively and appropriately. While a student may possess extensive knowledge of English grammar, they may lack the skill to articulate their thoughts clearly in a high-pressure interview or write a coherent academic essay. The GST course aims to bridge this gap through practical exercises, presentations, and writing assignments, providing students with opportunities to practice and refine their communicative skills. Spitzberg emphasises that skill is observable and measurable, making it a critical focus for empirical evaluation using corpus-based methodologies (Spitzberg, 2000:104).

The third component, motivation, is the affective dimension of communicative competence. It refers to an individual's desire, willingness, and psychological readiness to engage in communication. Motivation is influenced by factors such as self-efficacy, communication apprehension, and the perceived value of the interaction. In the educational context, students' motivation to learn and apply English communication skills is often tied to their understanding of its relevance to their future careers. A competent communicator is not only knowledgeable and skilled but also motivated to adapt their communication style to meet the demands of different contexts and audiences.

Spitzberg's model further emphasises the dual criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness. Appropriateness refers to communication that aligns with the social and cultural expectations of a given context, avoiding behaviours that might be deemed offensive or incongruent. Effectiveness, on the other hand, is the degree to which communication achieves its intended goals, such as persuading an audience, conveying information clearly, or building a professional relationship. The efficacy of the GST course, therefore, must be evaluated based on its ability to produce graduates who can communicate both appropriately and effectively in diverse academic and workplace scenarios.

### 2.2 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, formalised by Gary S. Becker in his seminal 1964 work, provides the economic and sociological framework for understanding the value of education as an investment. The theory posits that individuals and societies invest in education, training, and skill development with the expectation of future returns,

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primarily in the form of higher earnings, increased productivity, and enhanced employability (Becker, 1964:15). Human capital refers to the intangible assets—such as knowledge, skills, health, and experience—that individuals possess and that contribute to their economic value in the labour market.

In the context of higher education, Human Capital Theory suggests that universities function as critical sites for human capital accumulation. Students invest time, effort, and financial resources into their education, anticipating that the knowledge and skills they acquire will yield substantial dividends in their professional lives. The "Communication in English" GST course at EKSU represents a specific, targeted investment in a critical component of human capital: communicative competence.

Becker distinguishes between general and specific human capital. General human capital refers to skills and knowledge that are broadly applicable across various jobs and industries, such as literacy, numeracy, and basic communication skills. Specific human capital, conversely, is tailored to a particular firm or specialised role. The GST course primarily focuses on developing general human capital, providing students with a foundational proficiency in English that is essential for success in almost any professional domain. However, as the demands of the modern workforce evolve, there is an increasing need for language courses to also cultivate more specific, industry-aligned communication skills, such as technical writing, professional correspondence, and persuasive presentation.

The application of Human Capital Theory to language education underscores the direct correlation between communicative competence and employability. In a globalised economy where English serves as the lingua franca of business, science, and technology, proficiency in the language is a highly valued asset. Employers seek graduates who can articulate ideas clearly, collaborate effectively in teams, and navigate complex professional interactions. Therefore, the efficacy of the GST course can be measured by its contribution to the students' human capital, specifically their readiness to enter and succeed in the labour market (Schultz, 1961:8).

### 2.3 Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework

The intersection of Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the "Communication in English" GST course. While Communication Competence Theory offers a detailed psychological and behavioural model of what constitutes effective communication (knowledge, skill, motivation, appropriateness, and effectiveness), Human Capital Theory explains why these competencies are economically and socially valuable (employability, productivity, and return on investment).

The synthesis of these theories suggests that the GST course functions as a critical mechanism for human capital development by systematically cultivating students' communicative competence. The knowledge and skills acquired through the course are not merely academic exercises; they are tangible assets that enhance a graduate's value in the labour market. Furthermore, students' motivation to develop these competencies is deeply intertwined with their understanding of the economic returns associated with strong communication skills.

This corpus-based methodology empirically evaluates the linguistic output of EKSU students, providing objective data on their actual communicative skills (Spitzberg's domain). Simultaneously, by assessing students' perceived employability and readiness, the research connects these linguistic findings to the broader economic implications of language education (Becker's domain). This integrated theoretical approach ensures that the evaluation of the GST course is both pedagogically rigorous and socio-economically relevant, offering a holistic understanding of its efficacy in producing competent, employable graduates.

### 3. Literature Review

The evaluation of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University necessitates a comprehensive review of the existing literature across several interconnected domains. This section explores the historical and contemporary landscape of English language education in Nigeria, the utility of corpus-based approaches in language evaluation, the nexus between communication skills and employability, and a review of empirical studies assessing the impact of communication courses in higher education.

### 3.1 English Language Education in Nigeria

The English language occupies a unique and dominant position in Nigeria's sociolinguistic landscape. As a legacy of British colonialism, English has evolved from an administrative tool into the nation's official language, serving as the primary medium of instruction across all levels of the educational system (Oluwatayo, 2021:114). In Nigerian higher education, proficiency in English is not merely an academic prerequisite but a critical gateway to knowledge acquisition, professional development, and socio-economic advancement.

The General Studies (GST) program was introduced into the Nigerian university curriculum by the National Universities Commission (NUC) with the overarching goal of producing well-rounded graduates. The "Communication in English" course (often designated as GST 111 or GST 101/102) is a compulsory component of this program. Its primary objective is to remedy the linguistic deficiencies that many students exhibit upon entering the university, ensuring they possess the necessary reading, writing, and speaking skills to cope with the rigours of academic discourse (Adegbite, 2018:45).

However, despite the institutionalisation of this course, scholars have consistently highlighted systemic challenges in its implementation. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, and a heavy reliance on theoretical grammar teaching over practical communicative exercises have been widely documented (Oluwatayo, 2021:116). Consequently, many students pass the course without achieving the functional communicative competence required for their disciplines or future careers. This pedagogical disconnect underscores the need for empirical evaluations, such as the current study, to assess the actual linguistic output of students and identify areas for curriculum reform.

### 3.2 Corpus-Based Approaches in Language Evaluation

Corpus linguistics has revolutionised the study of language by providing empirical, data-driven methodologies for analysing authentic language use. A corpus is a large, principled collection of naturally occurring spoken or written texts, stored electronically and analysed using specialised software (Conrad, 1999:307). In the context of language education, corpus-based approaches offer a robust alternative to traditional, intuition-based evaluations, allowing researchers to objectively quantify linguistic features such as lexical richness, syntactic complexity, and pragmatic appropriateness.

The application of corpus linguistics to learner language—often referred to as Learner Corpus Research (LCR)—has proven particularly valuable in identifying the specific linguistic challenges faced by second language (L2) learners. By comparing learner corpora with reference corpora of expert or native-speaker language, researchers can pinpoint areas of over-use, under-use, or mis-use of specific linguistic features (Curry, 2021:28). For instance, corpus analyses of Nigerian students' academic writing have frequently revealed an over-reliance on informal vocabulary, a lack of syntactic variety, and difficulties with cohesive devices (Adegbite, 2018:52).

In evaluating the efficacy of the GST course, a corpus-based approach allows for a granular assessment of whether the course objectives translate into measurable improvements in students' linguistic output. Rather than relying on subjective grading or self-reported surveys, corpus tools such as Wordsmith, WebMatrix, AntConc or Sketch Engine enable the systematic analysis of thousands of words produced by students. This methodology aligns with the "skill" component of Spitzberg's Communication Competence Theory, providing objective evidence of students' ability to execute communication behaviours effectively.

### 3.3 Communication Skills and Employability

The transition from higher education to the labour market is increasingly mediated by a graduate's possession of employability skills, among which communication skills consistently rank the highest. Employability is defined not merely as the ability to secure a job, but as the possession of a set of achievements, skills, understandings, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations (Jackson, 2014:46).

In the 21st-century knowledge economy, employers demand a workforce capable of articulating complex ideas, collaborating across diverse teams, and engaging in persuasive professional discourse. A survey of human

resource managers in Nigeria indicated that over 70% considered poor communication skills as the primary reason for the unemployability of many recent university graduates (Oluwatayo, 2021:120). This highlights a critical misalignment between university curricula and industry requirements.

Human Capital Theory posits that education is an investment that yields economic returns. However, the returns on the investment in the GST course are contingent upon the course's ability to develop the specific communicative competencies valued by the labour market. While general academic English is necessary for university success, it is often insufficient for professional environments, which require industry-specific registers, professional email etiquette, and effective oral presentation skills. The integration of these practical skills into the GST curriculum is essential for enhancing students' human capital and ensuring their competitiveness in the global workforce.

### 3.4 Review of Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have investigated the impact of communication courses on student performance and employability, yielding mixed results. A study by Adegbite (2018:55) evaluated the impact of a similar GST course in a Nigerian federal university using a pre-test/post-test design. The findings indicated a significant improvement in students' grammatical accuracy but noted only marginal gains in their ability to produce coherent, extended academic essays. This suggests that while theoretical knowledge of grammar may improve, the practical skill of sustained writing remains a challenge.

In a broader context, Jackson (2014:50) explored the alignment between university communication curricula and employer expectations in Australia. The study found that while graduates felt confident in their academic writing, employers reported significant deficiencies in their professional communication skills, particularly in client-facing interactions and persuasive writing. This highlights the need for communication courses to transcend traditional academic boundaries and incorporate authentic, workplace-oriented tasks.

Furthermore, corpus-based studies of Nigerian learner English have provided valuable insights into specific linguistic deficits. For example, an analysis of a corpus of undergraduate essays revealed a pervasive use of "Nigerianisms" – localised expressions and syntactic structures that, while acceptable in informal Nigerian contexts, deviate from standard international academic English (Oluwatayo, 2021:125). Such findings underscore the necessity of addressing pragmatic appropriateness in the GST curriculum, ensuring that students can navigate both local and global communicative contexts effectively.

In summary, the literature indicates that while GST communication courses are a vital component of Nigerian higher education, their current pedagogical frameworks often fall short of equipping students with the robust communicative competence required for employability. The present study addresses this gap by utilising a corpus-based methodology to provide an empirical evaluation of the course at Ekiti State University, framed within the theoretical constructs of Communication Competence and Human Capital.

## 4. Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, this study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative corpus linguistics with qualitative survey analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University (EKSU), capturing both the objective linguistic output of the students and their subjective perceptions of competence and employability.

### 4.1 Research Design

The core of the methodology is a corpus-based analytical approach. Corpus linguistics provides an empirical foundation for language evaluation by enabling the systematic analysis of large bodies of authentic text (Conrad, 1999:310). In this study, a specialised learner corpus was compiled from texts produced by EKSU students who had recently completed the GST course. This objective linguistic data was triangulated with survey data collected via structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, providing insights into the students' motivation, self-efficacy, and perceived readiness for the labour market – key components of both Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory.

#### 4.2 Study Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised undergraduate students at EKSU across eight (8) faculties (Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences, Management Sciences, Law, Education, Agriculture, and Engineering) who had successfully completed the "Communication in English" GST course in the preceding academic session. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 400 participants for the survey component, ensuring proportional representation across the faculties. From this sample, a subset of 100 students was selected to contribute to the learner corpus, providing both written and spoken language samples. Additionally, 20 students were purposefully selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative insights.

#### 4.3 Corpus Compilation

The EKSU Learner Corpus (EKSU-LC) was compiled specifically for this research. The corpus consisted of two sub-corpora: written and spoken.

**Written Sub-corpus:** The written data comprised 100 academic essays produced by the selected subset of students. The prompt required students to write a 500-word argumentative essay on a topic relevant to their field of study, simulating the type of academic and professional writing expected of university graduates. The total word count for the written sub-corpus was approximately 50,000 words.

**Spoken Sub-corpus:** The spoken data was generated through simulated professional interactions. The same 100 students participated in a 5-minute mock job interview, responding to standardised questions designed to elicit persuasive and descriptive speech. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and annotated for linguistic analysis. The spoken sub-corpus yielded approximately 65,000 words.

In total, the EKSU-LC comprised approximately 115,000 words, providing a robust dataset for analysing the students' post-course communicative competence.

#### 4.4 Data Collection Instruments

Three primary instruments were utilised for data collection:

- 1 **The EKSU Learner Corpus (EKSU-LC):** As described above, this provided the objective linguistic data.
- 2 **Communication Competence and Employability Questionnaire (CCEQ):** A 30-item structured questionnaire was administered to the 400 participants. The CCEQ was adapted from Spitzberg's (1983) Communication Competence Scale and tailored to the Nigerian higher education context. It assessed students' self-perceived knowledge, skill, and motivation, as well as their confidence in their employability. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).
- 3 **Semi-Structured Interviews:** An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was used to explore the nuances of students' experiences with the GST course, their perceived communicative challenges, and their expectations regarding the labour market.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis proceeded in two phases: corpus analysis and statistical analysis of the survey data.

**Corpus Analysis:** The EKSU-LC was analysed using AntConc (version 4.2), a freeware corpus analysis toolkit. The analysis focused on three specific linguistic parameters indicative of communicative competence:

- **Lexical Richness:** Measured using the Type-Token Ratio (TTR) and lexical density metrics to assess the variety and sophistication of the students' vocabulary.
- **Syntactic Complexity:** Evaluated by analysing sentence length, clause structure, and the frequency of subordinate clauses.

- **Pragmatic Appropriateness:** Assessed through the analysis of specific pragmatic markers, cohesive devices (e.g., transitional adverbs), and the presence of informal or localised expressions ("Nigerianisms") in formal academic contexts.

The findings from the EKSU-LC were compared against a reference corpus of standard academic English to identify areas of significant divergence.

**Statistical and Qualitative Analysis:** The quantitative data from the CCEQ was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 28). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated to summarise the survey responses. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson correlation coefficients, were utilised to examine the relationship between self-perceived communication competence and perceived employability. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes related to the efficacy of the GST course and its alignment with labour market demands.

Therefore, the adoption of this methodology ensures a rigorous, multidimensional evaluation of the GST course, grounded in empirical data and theoretical frameworks.

## 5. Results and Findings

The findings of this study are presented in two main sections: the objective linguistic evaluation derived from the corpus analysis, and the subjective assessment based on the survey and interview data. These results provide a comprehensive picture of the efficacy of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University.

### 5.1 Corpus Analysis Findings

The analysis of the EKSU Learner Corpus (EKSU-LC) using AntConc revealed significant insights into the students' lexical richness, syntactic complexity, and pragmatic appropriateness.

#### Lexical Richness and Syntactic Complexity

The Type-Token Ratio (TTR), which measures lexical variation, indicated that while students possessed a functional vocabulary, they lacked the sophisticated academic lexicon expected at the university level. The average TTR for the written sub-corpus was 42.3%, which is notably lower than the 55-60% typically observed in proficient academic writing (Conrad, 1999:312). Furthermore, the analysis of syntactic complexity revealed a strong preference for simple and compound sentences over complex structures. The frequency of subordinate clauses was relatively low, suggesting a deficit in the students' ability to construct multi-layered arguments.

#### Pragmatic Appropriateness and Cohesion

A critical aspect of communicative competence is appropriateness. The corpus analysis highlighted a pervasive issue with register and tone. Students frequently employed informal vocabulary and colloquial "Nigerianisms" in their formal academic essays. For example, phrases such as "to make ends meet" or "it is a known fact that" were overused, detracting from the objective, academic tone required.

**Table 1 summarises the frequency of specific cohesive devices and pragmatic markers in the EKSU-LC compared to a standard academic reference corpus.**

Linguistic Feature	EKSU-LC Frequency (per 10,000 words)	Reference Corpus Frequency (per 10,000 words)	Interpretation
<b>Additive Transitions</b> (e.g., <i>moreover</i> , <i>furthermore</i> )	45.2	28.5	Overuse; indicating a reliance on simple addition rather than complex logical progression.

Linguistic Feature	EKSU-LC Frequency (per 10,000 words)	Reference Corpus Frequency (per 10,000 words)	Interpretation
<b>Contrastive Transitions</b> (e.g., <i>however, nevertheless</i> )	12.4	35.2	Underuse; suggesting difficulty in articulating counter-arguments or nuanced contrast.
<b>Informal Markers</b> (e.g., <i>basically, nowadays</i> )	58.7	15.3	Significant overuse; indicating a failure to maintain a formal academic register.
<b>Modal Verbs of Obligation</b> (e.g., <i>must, should</i> )	72.1	40.5	Overuse; reflecting a prescriptive or didactic tone rather than an objective, analytical one.

**Table 1: Frequency of Cohesive Devices and Pragmatic Markers in the EKSU-LC.**

The corpus findings indicate that while the GST course may provide basic grammatical knowledge, it falls short in developing the sophisticated skill and pragmatic awareness necessary for highly competent communication, as defined by Spitzberg's theory.

## 5.2 Survey and Interview Findings

The Communication Competence and Employability Questionnaire (CCEQ) provided insights into the students' self-perceived competence and their confidence in their employability.

### Self-Perceived Competence and Employability

The descriptive statistics revealed a contrast between the students' subjective self-assessment and the objective corpus findings. Generally, students reported moderate to high levels of confidence in their communication skills following the GST course.

**Table 2 presents the mean scores for the key constructs measured by the CCEQ.**

Construct (Scale 1-5)	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Self-Perceived Knowledge of English	4.12	0.75
Self-Perceived Communication Skill	3.85	0.82
Motivation to Communicate	4.30	0.65
Perceived Employability	3.60	0.95

Construct (Scale 1-5)	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Confidence in Professional Writing	3.45	1.02
Confidence in Oral Presentations	3.75	0.88

Table 2: Mean Scores for Communication Competence and Employability Constructs.

The data indicates that students feel knowledgeable ( $M=4.12$ ) and highly motivated ( $M=4.30$ ), aligning with two components of Spitzberg's theory. However, their perceived employability ( $M=3.60$ ) and confidence in professional writing ( $M=3.45$ ) are notably lower. A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between self-perceived communication skill and perceived employability ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ), reinforcing the tenets of Human Capital Theory that students view their communication skills as a direct determinant of their labour market value.

### Qualitative Insights from Interviews

The semi-structured interviews provided context for these quantitative findings. Thematic analysis revealed that while students appreciated the foundational grammar taught in the GST course, they felt ill-equipped for specific workplace communication tasks. One engineering student noted, *"The course taught me how to write an essay, but I don't know how to write a technical report or a professional email to a client."* Another student highlighted the disconnect between academic English and interview skills: *"I can pass the GST exam, but when I had a mock interview, I struggled to express my ideas clearly and professionally."*

These qualitative insights, combined with the corpus data, suggest that the GST course successfully builds general human capital (basic English knowledge) but lacks the specific human capital development (industry-aligned communication skills) required for immediate employability.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study offer a nuanced evaluation of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University, viewed through the dual lenses of Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory. The integration of objective corpus data with subjective survey responses reveals a complex picture of the course's efficacy and its impact on graduate employability.

### 6.1 Evaluating Communicative Competence

According to Spitzberg's (1983) Communication Competence Theory, effective communication requires a synthesis of knowledge, skill, and motivation, resulting in interactions that are both appropriate and effective. The survey results indicate that the GST course successfully fosters the *knowledge* and *motivation* components. Students reported high levels of self-perceived knowledge of English and a strong motivation to communicate. This suggests that the pedagogical foundation of the course—teaching grammatical rules and emphasising the importance of English—is relatively sound.

However, the objective corpus analysis exposes significant deficiencies in the *skill* and *appropriateness* dimensions. The low lexical richness (TTR) and the over-reliance on simple syntactic structures indicate that students struggle to execute complex communicative behaviours. Furthermore, the pervasive use of informal markers and localised expressions in formal academic essays demonstrates a lack of pragmatic appropriateness. As Littlejohn (1982:118) notes, knowledge of grammar does not automatically translate into the skill of appropriate usage in diverse contexts. The GST course appears to suffer from this exact pedagogical disconnect; students know the rules but lack the practical skill to apply them appropriately in formal or professional registers.

## 6.2 Human Capital and Employability

From the perspective of Becker's (1964) Human Capital Theory, the GST course is an investment designed to yield returns in the form of enhanced employability and productivity. The survey data supports this theoretical premise, showing a strong positive correlation between students' self-perceived communication skills and their perceived employability. Students intrinsically understand that their communicative competence is a valuable asset in the labour market.

Yet, the qualitative interviews and the specific deficits identified in the corpus analysis (e.g., poor cohesive structuring, informal tone) suggest that the human capital generated by the course is largely *general* rather than *specific*. The course equips students with basic literacy but fails to develop the specific communicative competencies demanded by employers, such as professional correspondence, technical writing, and persuasive oral presentation (Jackson, 2014:52). Consequently, the return on investment is sub-optimal. The gap between course completion and actual labour market readiness remains wide, as the curriculum is not sufficiently aligned with the practical communicative realities of the 21st-century workplace.

## 6.3 Curriculum Limitations and Pedagogical Challenges

The findings highlight significant limitations in the current GST curriculum. The over-reliance on theoretical grammar instruction and standardised testing fails to cultivate the functional, pragmatic skills required for competent communication. The corpus data, showing an overuse of additive transitions and a lack of contrastive nuance, suggests that students are taught to produce formulaic texts rather than to engage in critical, analytical discourse (Adegbite, 2018:58).

To truly function as an effective mechanism for human capital development, the GST course must evolve from a remedial grammar class into a dynamic, industry-aligned communication laboratory. The current pedagogical approach must be re-evaluated to prioritise experiential learning, contextual appropriateness, and specific professional communication tasks, ensuring that the theoretical knowledge translates into practical, employable skills.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has provided a rigorous, corpus-based evaluation of the "Communication in English" GST course at Ekiti State University, grounded in Communication Competence Theory and Human Capital Theory. The findings indicate that while the course successfully imparts foundational linguistic knowledge and fosters student motivation, it falls short in developing the practical skills and pragmatic appropriateness necessary for highly competent communication. Consequently, the course's contribution to students' specific human capital and immediate employability remains sub-optimal. The disconnect between theoretical instruction and the practical demands of the labour market necessitates urgent curriculum reform.

Based on the empirical findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. **Curriculum Realignment:** The GST curriculum must be updated to integrate specific, industry-aligned communication tasks. Modules on professional email etiquette, technical report writing, persuasive oral presentations, and cross-cultural workplace communication should be prioritised over rote grammar instruction.
2. **Experiential Pedagogy:** Instructional methodologies should shift towards experiential learning. Incorporating mock interviews, role-playing, and case-study analyses will provide students with the practical opportunities needed to develop the *skill* and *appropriateness* dimensions of communicative competence.
3. **Corpus-Informed Teaching Materials:** Educators should utilise learner corpus data to identify and address the specific linguistic deficits of Nigerian students, such as the inappropriate use of informal registers in formal contexts. Teaching materials should explicitly contrast academic/professional English with localised "Nigerianisms" to enhance pragmatic awareness.

4. **Formative Assessment:** Evaluation methods must move beyond multiple-choice grammar tests. Continuous, formative assessments based on practical communicative outputs (e.g., presentations, portfolios) will provide a more accurate measure of a student's actual competence and readiness for the workforce.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies tracking the career trajectories of graduates to assess the long-term impact of communication courses on actual employment outcomes. Additionally, expanding the corpus analysis to include multiple Nigerian universities would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the national landscape of English language education.

### Funding

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