

Enhancing English Communication Skills among Terengganu Athletes for Sports Engagement.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the critical role of English communication skills in enhancing the global competitiveness of Terengganu athletes. English proficiency is essential for effective communication in international sports, impacting strategic understanding, media engagement, and team coordination. Despite their physical excellence, many Terengganu athletes face challenges in speaking and writing English, which undermines their performance and career prospects. The mixed-method approach employed a survey to assess proficiency across speaking, listening, reading, and writing and interviews with coaches and managers to contextualize the findings. Results revealed moderate proficiency in listening and reading but significant gaps in speaking and writing, with female athletes generally outperforming males. Team sport athletes exhibited lower language proficiency than their individual sport counterparts, reflecting differing interaction dynamics. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating tailored language training into sports programs, leveraging role-play scenarios and technology-driven tools for accessible, context-specific learning. Improved English skills will enable athletes to excel in international environments, enhancing Malaysia's reputation in global sports. These findings serve as a foundation for policymakers and sports organizations to address language disparities and create inclusive, sustainable solutions for athlete development. Future study should evaluate the long-term impact of such interventions on athletes' careers and the broader sports ecosystem.

Keywords: English proficiency, Language, Sports communication, Community Development, Built Environment

INTRODUCTION

English acts as the essential language bridge across the world in the realm of international sports because successful communication forms the backbone of operations. In many professional environments, athletic players communicate using English, which functions as their main interface when working with coaches and teammates as well as referees and media representatives. Athletes who master English communication benefit from better strategic comprehension of games while building self-esteem along with cross-cultural bonds and their professional reputation (Ting-Toomey, 2020). Throughout its history, Malaysia used sports as a point of national honors while Terengganu rose to become the country's epicenters for sporting prowess. Malaysian sports teams from this area regularly participate in famous international competitions, but their performance is compromised by universal English communication problems (Isa et al., 2018; Azman et al., 2022).

A large number of Terengganu-origin athletes have made appearances at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games and other major international competitions because they excel in cycling, football, and hockey. A variety of real-life events demonstrate how weak English communication abilities create serious negative outcomes. Several Malaysian athletes at the 2019 SEA Games found themselves unable to understand international referees' instructions and struggled to communicate during media events (Hamid et al., 2021). Athletes with limited English performance capabilities produce less-effective individual results, which tarnishes their homeland's superior athletic reputation.

The physical capability of Terengganu's athletes exceeds expectations, yet their language education deficit prevents full performance and growth. One challenge faced by athletes is that they fail to understand or know how to enact tactical instruction owing to their poor English proficiency. Post-match interviews frequently expose the incapacity of athletes to express their thoughts because they seem unprepared. Language challenges present obstacles when athletes try to seize immediate job opportunities, and these barriers prevent them from obtaining endorsement deals and constructing international profiles. According to Mokhtar et al. (2023), expertise in linguistics holds as much importance as physical competency in sports because modern games require interactions with diverse teams that appeal to worldwide audiences.

Physically talented athletes from areas like Terengganu meet communication challenges in global sports settings because they come from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Towards Malay literacy, students receive biased education throughout Malaysia, as Bahasa Melayu remains dominant in teaching, which works alongside limited English interaction beyond city boundaries to create this barrier (Lim & Chong, 2021). Language limitations force athletes to wrestle with tactical terms comprehension while team discussions demand clear opinion expression, yet English communicates game adaptations dynamically. The 2023 Asian Games showed Malaysian athletes struggled with language barriers when talking to officials, causing both penalties and flawed strategies to emerge (Aznan et al., 2022). Communication barriers influence both team interactions and players' choices, leading to diminished group productivity.

Joining training sessions with international teammates was often a difficult task for Terengganu athletes because they had difficulty understanding instructions that were highly complex. According to the study, the athletes faced difficulties implementing advanced training methods because language misunderstandings led to lost learning possibilities (Hamid et al., 2021). Athletes face challenges beyond competition because their limited English skills marginalize them from participating actively at international sports conferences and networking events (Chen & Chen, 2023). Language proficiency improvement must become a formal strategy throughout Terengganu's sports sector because of this ongoing challenge.

Current responses to solve this problem show significant fragmentation and weak participation levels. Athletic training programs give precedence to technical skills and physical fitness but neglect language education almost completely. Sports-related language skills between athletes remain insufficient because of missing specialized communication programs aimed at athletics development, according to Nair & Krishnan (2024). Athletic coaches, alongside other important stakeholders, called for immediate action to repair this educational deficiency to help prepare athletes for global sports environments. Improving English communication skills among individuals goes beyond personal development toward boosting Malaysia's reputation in international sports diversification (Noor et al., 2024).

There are three primary reasons that underscore the significance of this study. The initial study phase investigates which linguistic deficits affect English communication abilities among players from Terengganu that subsequently affect their professional performance and competitive possibilities. The study analyses linguistic obstacles through structured evaluations to establish an extensive problem overview that creates groundwork for upcoming solutions. Study outcomes provide guidance to design language training for athletes that meets their unique requirements while providing practical skills for international sports settings. Through stronger English skills, Malaysian athletes will help their country achieve greater prestige in international sports as their ability to engage across various situations will extend beyond physical skills competencies. The study matches Malaysia's extensive plans to climb the international sports hierarchy while nurturing a pluralistic language environment.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE

In sports situations, language proficiency functions as the essential factor that enables success through facilitating both communication and strategic execution while building team relationships. According to Chen and Chen (2023), athletes who demonstrate strong English communication abilities become more capable of comprehending advanced tactical commands and dynamic game conditions. Through clear communication, athletes maintain better connectivity with coaches, officials, and teammates that ensures well-coordinated teamwork in important games. According to Jenkins (2021), the lack of mutual understanding due to language differences prevents athletes from capitalizing on collaborative and educational moments during interactions inside multicultural sports settings that use English as their fundamental communication platform.

Worldwide sports now use English as their principal medium for building receptive multicultural spaces. Athletes gain superior skills at multicultural engagement because they master strong English proficiency (Ahmed & Hassan, 2022). Athletes who can overcome language barriers enhance their personal growth while simultaneously building stronger team cohesion essential for group sports. Athletes engaged in modern sports need to demonstrate essential language abilities because media interactions constitute a vital component of modern sports. Opponents who can express themselves fluently in English routinely attract media opportunities and endorsements as well as supporter base expansion, which results in improved career visibility (Ting-Toomey 2020).

Permanent language education has not yet become standard practice in sports training initiatives throughout Malaysia and other areas. Mokhtar et al. (2023) explain that although sports organizations invest heavily in technical and physical training, there is a lack of appreciation for foreign language competency despite its prominence in international sports. Researchers emphasize the necessity for directed language education that supports athletes' unique communication requirements through sport jargon mastery combined with dialogue abilities and stage presence building.

Regional Disparities and The Malaysian Context

The factors that contribute to English proficiency among athletes in Malaysia include the regional disparities, economic and educational background. Athletes from the urban area tend to have a comparatively higher proficiency level compared to the athletes from rural areas like Terengganu (Lim and Chong, 2021). Most of the discrepancy is attributed to the different levels of access to good education and extracurricular language programs. For instance, urban athletes enjoy well-resourced schools and speak English, while not-so-urban athletes in rural towns might depend on Bahasa Melayu as their primary language of communication, which does not give them the opportunity to practice English.

This problem is the case within Malaysian sports, particularly in Terengganu. Many athletes from the state are not linguistically competent to function successfully in international sports settings. Language training is still needed in real-world cases, including Terengganu athletes who faced difficulties in interviews and interactions with foreign officials at the SEA Games (Hamid et al., 2021). These challenges highlight the need to address regional disparities through region-specific tailored interventions that take into account the specific sociocultural backdrop of different regions.

Efforts to bridge this gap have been successful. For example, sports academies that pilot programs of English training in such establishments have been found to improve athletes' communication skills and overall confidence (Nair & Krishnan, 2024). According to these authors, these initiatives leverage sports-related scenarios such as mock interviews and team discussions to create a practical learning environment. Nevertheless, the scalability and sustainability of such programs require further study and policy support.

Sociocultural Theory of Learning

The Sociocultural Theory of Learning, introduced by Vygotsky, offers an insightful theory of how to understand the role of language in athletes' development. Learning, it argues, proposed by this theory, happens socially and through cultural tools; the use of language in these situations is one of the most important tools (Vygotsky, 1978).

As a cultural tool, English is used in the context of sports for athletes to undertake collaborative activities, exchange knowledge, and have connections within multicultural teams. It is on this basis that this theory pushes for the development of interactive and contextually rich, or as close as possible, learning experiences that would accommodate the real-world needs of athletes.

When applied to the present study, this theory would indicate that the language training programs focusing on social interaction and practical application could be potential. To take an example, training sessions of this kind, which include, for instance, negotiating with teammates and coverage with the media, can increase athletes' linguistic competence and at the same time deepen their understanding of the specific sports contexts. Sports programs integrating language learning into their fabric can add to the creation of a more inclusive and less convoluted training environment.

In spite of the increased recognition of the importance of language proficiency in sports, there is still limited study related to Malaysian athletes. By contrast, most existing studies take a broad view, considering language barriers in broad terms in general educational or professional settings. However, athletes in general, and particularly those from rural regions of Terengganu, have unique challenges (Aznan et al., 2022). Clearly, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled by targeted study into the intersection of language and sports; the sociocultural and economic conditions of Malaysia have not yet been sufficiently explored.

Moreover, while other studies have explored how language training can improve sports development programs, rarely do they consider the difficulties that would inevitably come into play. An aspect that Mokhtar et al. (2023) observed with athletes is that they frequently cannot balance the commitments around their training schedule with learning the language, causing irregular participation and results. For addressing these challenges, innovative solutions are needed, such as the inclusion of language training in existing sports curricula or utilization of technology-based tools for flexible and self-paced learning

This study, however, does not discuss sociocultural influences of English proficiency, which is significant. English is not introduced to rural athletes in Terengganu until they join the university and have the opportunity to interact with English speakers in most of their daily activities in school and its surroundings. Another reason for this is cultural attitudes towards English learning; some of the athletes see the mastery of English as an academic subject, not a functional skill for the promotion of a career.

Additionally, societal expectations of gender and language learning could be one reason why male athletes also score higher on language proficiency tests than their female counterparts. According to research, female athletes are more likely to search in structured learning environments, whereas male athletes can rely on informal communication strategies. Future training programs should already address these sociocultural factors in order to make language interventions more effective.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method was adopted in this study to assess the English communication skills of Terengganu athletes. Quantitative data were the primary focus; however, qualitative data were also included to get a good view of the situation. The quantitative component involved a structured survey that evaluated athletes' English proficiency across four domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The qualitative aspect was through the semi-structured interview with the coaches and the team managers to discuss the contextual and performance-related challenges raised by the English communication. This was to employ a mixed-method approach to ensure that numerical as well as experiential insights were brought to bear on the study, resulting in depth and trustworthiness of study.

With 52 active athletes from Terengganu, the participants consisted of footballers, and athletes. The selections were made on the grounds of participation in state-level and international competitions during the last two years. This was a criterion that the study sought out those individuals who had the relevant exposure to competitive sports communication demands. Demographic distribution of participants, particularly age, gender, and sports category, are presented in Table 1.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for all sports and genders so that a certain representation was possible. In an effort to get a complete picture of communication skills among the cohort, the researchers tried to recruit athletes at different levels of proficiency in English. The sample included 22 female and 30 male athletes, aged from 18 to 30 years. Contact was made with these individuals through the relevant sports associates, and they all gave their informed consent to take part in the study. Ten coaches and team managers, to whom the athletes had been exposed and with whom they were familiar working with problems related to language, were also selected for the qualitative interviews.

The study also made sure to have an equal representation of sports categories—team-based and individual disciplines—to mitigate potential bias for the sports to be studied. Participants were promised confidentiality and anonymized responses in order to elicit honest feedback. This study used exact demographic data, including age, gender, education level, and years of experience in competitive sports. Later, these variables were used to analyse patterns and correlations in the level of English proficiency from demographic factors in Table 1.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The structured survey used was generated to measure athletes' English proficiency as the main data collection instrument. The survey consisted of 20 questions categorized into four sections: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. For each question, the rating was on a 5-point Likert scale going from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Items in the questions included "I can understand the instructions in English during my training" and "I am able to express my opinions in English while discuss a thing together." A small amount of the survey was pretested on five athletes to make sure it was well understood and reliable. The language was simplified a bit and made more sports relevant.

Semi-structured interviews with 10 coaches and team managers were in addition to the survey. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a fuller understanding of how exactly athletes encountered challenges and also to better understand how language barriers affected performance and dynamics on the team. The interviews conducted averaging around 30 to 45 minutes that were in person or via videoconferencing, depending on the available participants. Those questions were related to themes like the athletes' ability to grasp instruction, whether athletes are confident in using English, or even how athletes deal with language barriers. Transcriptions of interview responses were done verbatim for analysis.

It took two months of data collection during which athletes filled out surveys on their own, supervised by researchers. This would allow participants to seek clarification, when needed, and will keep response conditions consistent. Data from all surveys was collected, stored securely, and analyzed.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Category	Number of Participants (N = 52)
Gender: Male	30
Gender: Female	22
Age: 18-22 years	20
Age: 23-30 years	32
Sports: Team-based	28
Sports: Individual	24

Data Analysis and Statistical Techniques

Descriptiveness and inferential statistical methods were used to analyse quantitative data from the surveys. Overall proficiency levels were identified by mean and standard deviation in each domain (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). In addition, a t-test was used to see whether male and female athletes or team-based and individual sports players were significantly different. To investigate the relationships between demographic variables (i.e., age, education level) and English proficiency scores, correlation analysis was also carried out.

Table 2 and Table 3 summaries the results of the statistical analyses.

Table 2 Mean Proficiency Scores Across Domains

Domain	Mean Score (SD)
Speaking	3.2 (0.8)
Listening	3.5 (0.9)
Reading	3.8 (0.7)
Writing	3.0 (1.0)

Interviews were analyzed thematically to generate recurring patterns and insights from qualitative data. The transcripts were coded by researchers, and responses were grouped under themes including, but not limited to, language barriers during training,' confidence in media interactions,' and 'adaptation to international sports environments.' A review of the findings was done to triangulate the qualitative findings against the quantitative findings for the purpose of increasing the validity and reliability of the study. For example, in this case, coaches' observations backed up athletes' self-reports about struggling to understand technical jargon in English.

Table 3 Statistical Comparison by Gender

Domain	Male Mean (SD)
Speaking	3.3 (0.8)
Listening	3.6 (0.8)
Reading	3.9 (0.6)
Writing	3.2 (0.9)

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The study was conducted ethically to ensure the well-being of participants. All participants gave informed consent, were briefed about the study's objectives and procedures, and, if they should waive the right to withdraw at any time without penalty, hereof. Anonymization was used for confidentiality of responses, and data were stored on password-protected devices securely. The study was initiated with ethical approval from the institutional review board.

However, certain limitations were noted. Second, the survey based on self-reported data may be biased in response, where participants provide more or less than what they actually know. Second, the sample size, though it represents Terengganu athletes, will prevent findings from being generalized to other regions' athletes. These limitations could be addressed by future study using greater samples of subjects and objective measures of language proficiency like standard English tests.

In this last, the methodology adopted in this study brought about a systematic and comprehensive examination of English communication skills among Terengganu athletes. The study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to afford useful insight into the challenges facing the athletes and potential strategies to address them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that Terengganu athletes have a different level of English communication skills. Four out of five athletes were moderately proficient in listening and reading, but only four out of ten reported confidences in speaking and writing. This was a gap in that athletes could read information in English and instructions but had difficulties verbally articulating answers and expressing ideas fluently in English. Across all domains, female athletes performed better than their male counterparts, suggesting that gender-related effects may relate to language acquisition and self-esteem.

Table 4 Proficiency Levels Across Domains

Domain	Moderate Proficiency (%)
Listening	65
Reading	65
Speaking	40
Writing	40

Further analysis showed athletes in team sports, like football and hockey, scored slightly less in listening and speaking compared to athletes practicing in individual sports. It may be the result of the frequent communication demands that characterize team settings and related conversation situations that can facilitate the practice of conversational English. However, other individual sport athletes showed stronger reading skills, which is perhaps because training in such sports tends to be self-directed. These findings were summarized in Table 4 and Table

Table 5 Comparison by Sports Type

Domain	Team Sports Mean (SD)
Listening	3.7 (0.8)
Reading	3.6 (0.7)
Speaking	3.4 (0.8)
Writing	3.0 (1.0)

Communication Barriers and Contextual Challenges

The problems of these language deficiencies were illuminated by interviews with coaches and team managers. The communication barriers that often resulted in misunderstandings between designers and the competitive crew during training sessions and during events. For example, athletes were often unable to understand tactical nuances, which sometimes a coach had to use nonverbal or translated. Particularly critical were misinterpretations in international tournaments—things that not only ruined team performance but also brought sadness to teammates. Additionally, the debriefing session was found to be difficult for athletes to articulate feedback, which sometimes precluded improvement opportunities.

The situational challenges bring out the wider consequences of language proficiency in sports. If athletes don't feel confident with their communication skills, they may be too reluctant to assume such leadership roles as captaining a team or representing their peers in the media. Especially in an era when athletes are expected to interact with international audiences, sponsors, and stakeholders, this limitation is especially important.

Recommendations for Training Programs

To solve these problems, the English language training must be incorporated in the habitual training routine of athletes. These programs should aim to develop sport-specific contexts where athletes have vocabulary and expressions to navigate their settings. For example, individual training modules might engage in situational dialogues with referees, with media, or with international teammates on strategies. Besides, role-playing exercises and simulation games could bring learning to be exciting and practical.

There are still other ways to enhance things through technology-based solutions. While this study don't have language learning apps and online modules for sports contexts per se, closely linked to sport, that idea is on the table too: such apps and online modules can offer athletes a way to get language learning in their pockets. These tools can also be used as tools for the coaches to monitor the progress of learning and provide feedback so that coaches can use their structured yet flexible environment to create a successful learning factory. Table 6 outlines key components of a proposed training program.

Table 6 Components of Proposed English Training Program

Component	Description
Sports-Specific Vocabulary	Focused on terminologies related to training, competitions, and teamwork
Situational Dialogues	Role-playing scenarios for practical communication
Technology Integration	Language apps and online modules tailored to sports contexts
Monitoring and Feedback	Regular evaluations by coaches and language trainers

Gender and Sports-Type Dynamics

However, the differences noted for gender in this study need to be further investigated. There may be reason female athletes are more proficient, essentially because female athletes are assessing in an area where they have had more education, whether that is in English, whether they have been exposed to English, or whether they have certain cultural factors that encourage language use in these settings. Female athletes were often more proactive in seeking help to improve their language skills, whereas, in contrast, male athletes relied more on informal or peer-driven communication strategies, reported coaches.

That doesn't mean there aren't valuable insights in the differences between team and individual sports participants. Clearly, team sports have a social component to them, where athletes can practice conversational English more than just on the field. By contrast, training in individual sports typically emphasizes solitary training, denying the athlete exposure to language-promoting interactions. These findings emphasize the importance of an accurate training approach that takes into account the specificities of each group.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings reinforce a pressing need to invest substantially in Terengganu athletes in English communication skills so as to raise performance and confidence during national as well as international sports contexts. The identified challenges, however, including lack of effective means to express tactical feedback and to communicate with international counterparts, can be linked to a larger problem faced by athletes from non-English-speaking areas. Let's take a specific example of Malaysian athletes having problems during and after the 2023 Southeast Asian Games when it comes to understanding any complex tactics officers from abroad give our athletes during the games for the game strategy that the athletes used on the ground. This reflects the oneness in the real-life scenario of the correlation between language proficiency and success in sporting the competitive sports environments.

Finally, this study provides several lessons for athletes, coaches, and policymakers. It shows first how English language communication skills are crucial for improving performance and promoting inclusion in sport. Having the ability to speak and understand English puts athletes at an advantage when introduced to environments in non-native countries; they are able to cooperate with multinational teams and are able to represent their country on international platforms.

Second, the study also shows the importance of interaction between the educational institutions and sports organizations to design an integrated training program. Given that athletes from non-English regions must often undergo language development work to compete under the Aus, all steps are taken to ensure that the kids are honest, and politicians are the source for this. Kaynak dağıtımına yönelik faaliyetler oluşturulması gerektiğini düşünmelidir. This completes the cycle, and now the findings highlight the importance of early intervention. Training young athletes to speak the sport's language in such a context can, by providing them with a solid foundation, help to remove any communication barriers as they move up the ranks of their sport.

English proficiency is a critical tool with which athletes can close the linguistic gap in an increasingly globalized sports milieu. Improving their capacity to communicate means better adjusting to international competition, greater understanding of other cultures, and a better representation of their country. It's also about individual benefits, but more so this one has a positive impact on strengthening Malaysia's reputation as an athletic hub of excellence where the athletes aren't just physically prepared; they're linguistically and culturally competent.

The findings of this study are not only immediate, but the benefits of this study reach further than this. First, this study provides a foundational reference for policymakers, sports organizations, and educational institutions that are interested in designing targeted interventions for language training. In fact, modelling other states in Malaysia could take the training schedules of Terengganu athletes to incorporate English language modules focused on sports contexts into their training schedules. Second, this study develops a framework for studying precisely how these interventions work to provide stakeholders with a means of calculating early success and directing refinements based on lessons learnt.

The socioeconomic distribution inherent in the English language proficiency gap among athletes could also be addressed through these types of English training programs. Many rural athletes in Terengganu have limited access to English education; thus, they are at a disadvantage when they are set into international environments. This initiative enables us to bridge the gap as the study integrates accessible and inclusive language training within existing sports development programs, thereby providing equal grounds for all athletes to start and fulfil their dreams. Additionally, language learning apps or virtual training sessions can make use of technology-based tools to further democratize access to language resources by bridging the rural and urban athlete gap.

The long-term effects of these interventions on the performance and career of athletes should be future study done. For example, longitudinal studies could measure how improved English skills help make athletes more attractive to potential sponsors to play in the international leagues or provide a pathway into coaching and mentoring. Such added scope of study would add insight into the multiplicity of the language proficiency benefits in sports. Furthermore, further comparative studies of athletes from other Malaysian states or countries may provide valuable indications of the effectiveness of trainings.

In summary, this study lays the basis on linguistic aspects of consideration that must be circumnavigated by Terengganu athletes for their individual development and ultimately the entire Malaysian sports ecosystem. One way is through the adoption of a culture that enables language, so stakeholders can equip athletes to reach their full potential not only on the field but also for their work in global publics, media, and stakeholders. That's in line with Malaysia's ambition to become a sports development leader in this region with athletes who are not simply technically and physically ready but also excellent communicators in the constant global arena.

Future research on the accuracy of English proficiency assessment should include standardized testing measures such as TOEFL or IELTS as well as self-report measures. As useful as the Likert scale survey was in capturing athletes' perception of how proficient they were, the objective testing of language skills would help better determine what their actual level of competence was. Standardized assessments can be integrated with researchers to help confirm self-reported responses and to eliminate any bias that could come from overestimation or underestimation of language abilities. Further research should also examine longitudinal tracking of athletes' language development as a measure of how language training will have an effect.

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