Vol. 3 No. 4 (2026): Quartus
https://doi.org/10.69760/jales.2026004003

Enhancing Military Cadets' English Language Competence for Personal and Professional Growth

[1] Rena Zulfiqarova, [2] Khatira Musayeva
[1, 2] Military Institute named after Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan

Abstract

English competence can support military cadets' academic participation, personal development, and future professional communication. Yet military English education cannot be reduced to memorizing terminology or passing proficiency tests: cadets need to understand, interpret, and produce language across general, academic, intercultural, and occupational settings. This article presents a critical narrative review of research on military English education, cadet needs, communicative competence, learner differences, and language-learning strategies. It synthesizes 15 sources, including three works specified for inclusion and 12 additional scholarly publications. The review identifies five connected priorities: needs-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP), integrated skills practice, scenario-based communication, differentiated support, and formative assessment linked to real communication goals. Game-based activities and digital tools can increase practice and engagement when they serve explicit language outcomes and remain accessible to learners with varied proficiency and cognitive profiles. The article proposes a practical development framework that connects baseline assessment, authentic but non-sensitive communication tasks, guided practice, feedback, reflection, and transfer to professional contexts. Because the article is literature-based, it reports no new participant data and does not claim a causal effect for any strategy. It concludes that cadets' language development is strongest when professional relevance is combined with inclusive teaching, systematic language support, and assessment of individual as well as collaborative performance.

Keywords: *military cadets; English language competence; English for Specific Purposes; communicative competence; learner autonomy; professional development; differentiated instruction*

1. Introduction

English functions as an important medium of communication in many multinational professional settings, including military cooperation. For cadets, language competence can shape access to professional information, participation in international training, academic study, and communication with colleagues from different linguistic backgrounds. Research on military English (ME) describes a field in which instruction must respond to a range of learner backgrounds, professional specializations, and communicative demands rather than follow a single general-English syllabus (Siegel et al., 2025; Orna-Montesinos, 2018).

The educational objective is broader than acquiring a list of military terms. Cadets may need to read technical and academic texts, understand briefings, ask for clarification, summarize information, explain decisions, and communicate respectfully across cultures. A survey of defence-university cadets

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

identified all four language skills as relevant to future work and personal life, while also finding differences in how cadets ranked those skills (Ab. Rahman et al., 2023). Earlier work with a large military-academy sample likewise reported demand for ESP and occupationally relevant language, alongside concerns about rigid levels and teaching practices (Sung et al., 2016).

Language development also contributes to personal growth. Confidence in speaking, willingness to communicate, learner autonomy, and the ability to reflect on one's progress can influence how cadets engage with English beyond the classroom. Professional development, in turn, calls for clear and accurate communication, active listening, collaboration, and the ability to adapt language to a task and audience. These outcomes overlap, but they should be taught and assessed through observable language practices rather than assumed from participation alone.

This article addresses two research questions: (1) Which English-language competencies are most relevant to cadets' personal and professional development? (2) Which instructional and assessment strategies can help military English education develop those competencies while accommodating differences in proficiency and learning needs?

2. Review Approach and Scope

This article uses a critical narrative-review approach. It brings together 15 works: three sources specified by the requester and 12 additional articles selected for their relevance to military English education, cadet needs, communication, individual differences, technology, and game-based language learning. The sources include empirical studies, a scoping review, and a systematic review or meta-analysis. The review compares their implications for curriculum design and teaching rather than estimating a pooled effect.

The review is selective rather than systematic. It does not claim exhaustive database coverage, formal risk-of-bias assessment, or a PRISMA-based selection process. Findings from individual studies are interpreted in relation to their settings and designs; evidence from one academy or learner group should not automatically be generalized to other military institutions. No new classroom data are reported in this article.

3. Competence for Personal and Professional Growth

3.1. Integrated language skills and task performance

Military English curricula should retain a strong foundation in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension while giving learners structured opportunities to use these resources in connected tasks. A task such as reading a short professional text, identifying its main claim, discussing its implications, and giving a concise oral summary combines receptive and productive skills. Babayev's (2022) discussion of the relationship among skills under traditional methods is useful here: accuracy-focused instruction can contribute to skill development, but instruction should also help learners transfer knowledge across listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Cadet-needs research supports this integrated approach. Air cadets in Thailand identified speaking needs across everyday, military, presentation, and conference contexts and valued equal opportunities to speak, authentic materials, and sufficient practice time (Siraranghom, 2020). A needs analysis for submarine cadets similarly emphasizes aligning workbook design with the learner group's language

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

skills, topics, learning methods, and educational conditions (Diana & Aryana, 2025). Together, these studies suggest that professional relevance begins with careful analysis of what learners must do with English, not simply what vocabulary they are expected to memorize.

3.2. Intercultural and interpersonal communication

Professional communication involves more than grammatical accuracy. Cadets need to recognize when a message is unclear, confirm understanding, ask follow-up questions, and adapt their speech to the listener and situation. In multinational settings, English may be used among speakers with different first languages and proficiency levels. Orna-Montesinos (2018) shows that language policy and professional practice can create tensions for military personnel when standardized proficiency expectations do not align with lived communication needs. Teaching should therefore emphasize intelligibility, clarification strategies, active listening, and intercultural awareness alongside formal correctness.

Active listening can be taught explicitly through paraphrasing, open questions, checking interpretations, and responding to the speaker's meaning. A study with Army ROTC cadets provides an example of how active-listening instruction can be examined as part of officer–soldier communication and leadership development (Bjornestad et al., 2021). In language classes, comparable practice can be built into peer interviews, short briefings, and collaborative problem-solving tasks without relying on sensitive operational scenarios.

3.3. Motivation, confidence, and learner autonomy

Cadets' motivation is shaped by whether classroom activities feel relevant, achievable, and supportive. Research on Saudi military cadets links aspects of the learning environment and learners' motivational self-concepts with effort and anxiety (Alqahtani, 2018). A later study found that perceived competence and anxiety were associated with willingness to communicate and the frequency of speaking in English (Alqahtani, 2023). These findings underline the value of a classroom climate where learners can practise, receive specific feedback, and make progress without unnecessary fear of public failure.

Autonomy is developed through guided responsibility: setting goals, tracking progress, choosing from suitable resources, and reflecting on which strategies help. Digital and blended instruction may support additional contact with English and flexible practice. An experimental study of ICT use in foreign-language training for future armed-forces officers reported potential benefits for language competence, motivation, and learner autonomy, while also illustrating the importance of aligning tools with teaching objectives (Sovhar, 2021). Technology should extend purposeful practice, not substitute for teacher guidance or face-to-face interaction.

4. Instructional Strategies for Cadet Language Development

4.1. Begin with needs analysis and proficiency mapping

Course design should start with a transparent analysis of target tasks, cadets' current proficiency, language gaps, and likely professional settings. Needs analysis can combine a learner questionnaire, short interviews, diagnostic tasks, instructor consultation, and review of non-sensitive workplace documents. The results can guide a curriculum that balances general English, academic literacy, and military ESP. Defence cadet studies show that learners' priorities differ by skill, course level, and perceived future use (Sung et al., 2016; Ab. Rahman et al., 2023).

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

Proficiency mapping should be used to place learners and plan support, not to label them permanently. A mixed-level class can work on a shared communication goal while using tiered texts, vocabulary support, sentence frames, and optional challenge tasks. This allows beginners to participate meaningfully while more advanced learners practise greater precision, detail, and audience adaptation.

4.2. Teach through realistic, low-risk scenarios

Scenario-based tasks help learners connect language forms with communicative purpose. Suitable classroom tasks include summarizing a non-sensitive public information text, introducing a team at an international event, clarifying a schedule, requesting repetition, describing an equipment feature in a general educational text, or giving a short briefing on a familiar topic. Such activities can be staged from controlled practice to freer communication. They should be realistic enough to create a purpose for speaking and listening, but carefully bounded so the language lesson does not simulate sensitive operational instructions.

Role-play and problem-solving tasks can require learners to ask questions, check details, paraphrase, negotiate roles, and produce a clear outcome. The teacher can pre-teach key expressions, model a short exchange, observe performance with a simple rubric, and invite learners to repeat the task after feedback. This sequence builds fluency while preserving attention to accuracy and intelligibility.

4.3. Integrate skills and reinforce language form

A coherent module can link reading, listening, discussion, and writing around one topic. Cadets might read a short article, listen to a short informational talk, identify key points, discuss a question, and write a structured summary. Focused grammar and vocabulary instruction can be introduced at points where learners need it. This avoids treating communication and form as competing aims: meaningful tasks create a reason to use English, while short explicit lessons help learners express increasingly precise meanings.

Traditional exercises remain useful for controlled practice, especially when learners need to consolidate core vocabulary, sentence patterns, or pronunciation. Babayev (2022) can be read alongside communicative and task-based approaches as a reminder that methods should be selected in relation to the skill and objective. The instructional goal is not to discard structured teaching, but to connect it to later communication and feedback.

4.4. Use games and digital tools with clear learning purposes

Game-based activities can provide repeated, low-stakes practice in vocabulary retrieval, listening, speaking turns, and teamwork. Sadiqzade and Alisoy (2024) describe using games across proficiency levels, while a systematic review of empirical EFL/ESL studies reports both promising outcomes and variation among contexts and designs (Chan & Lo, 2024). A recent meta-analysis also found that mobile games can support some language outcomes, particularly vocabulary and pronunciation, while effects on other skills were less consistent (Liu et al., 2025). These findings recommend selective use rather than assuming that a game automatically improves learning.

For cadets, game mechanics may include timed vocabulary review, information-gap missions, cooperative clue-solving, or team-based listening challenges. The teacher should align each activity with a target skill, keep competition respectful, and offer non-digital alternatives when devices or connectivity are limited. Scores and leaderboards should not replace evidence of individual learning.

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

Activities should also account for cognitive and proficiency differences. Mammadova (2025) discusses the role of working memory and aptitude in online form recognition, highlighting why learners may differ in how quickly they notice and process linguistic patterns. In practice, teachers can reduce unnecessary cognitive load by chunking instructions, previewing essential terms, modeling task steps, and providing extra processing time where appropriate.

5. Assessment and an Implementation Framework

Assessment should show whether each cadet can understand and produce English in relevant tasks, not only whether a group completed a product. A balanced framework can combine a baseline diagnostic, low-stakes formative checks, individual performance tasks, and reflective self-assessment. The assessment criteria should be visible before the task and should distinguish language performance from teamwork or content knowledge.

A practical six-stage cycle is proposed: (1) identify professional and personal communication needs; (2) map proficiency and establish a small set of learning outcomes; (3) teach the language resources required for the unit; (4) guide cadets through a realistic communicative task; (5) assess individual and collaborative performance using clear criteria; and (6) provide feedback, reflection, and a follow-up task that transfers learning to a new context.

An oral-briefing rubric, for example, could assess organization, intelligibility, accuracy of key terms, response to questions, and use of clarification strategies. A reading-and-summary task might assess comprehension, selection of relevant information, paraphrase, and written clarity. Teachers can use short recordings, drafts, vocabulary logs, and brief conferences to document progress over time. The goal is constructive evidence for learning rather than a single high-pressure score.

Professional growth should be treated as a plausible educational outcome, not assumed from improved classroom performance. To investigate longer-term effects, future research should measure language performance before and after instruction, document the learning activities delivered, and follow learners into subsequent academic or professional tasks where feasible. Research should also report context, proficiency range, sample size, assessment tools, and limitations so that instructors can judge how far findings may transfer.

6. Discussion

The literature points to a consistent design principle: military English is most useful when course content reflects cadets' actual communication needs and provides sufficient structured practice. Needs analyses identify variation in the skills cadets prioritize and the contexts in which they expect to use English (Siraranghom, 2020; Ab. Rahman et al., 2023; Diana & Aryana, 2025). The broader review of military English research similarly emphasizes diverse learner backgrounds and the need for context-sensitive instruction and assessment (Siegel et al., 2025).

The strategies discussed here combine professional relevance with general language development. Scenario-based tasks give learners a clear reason to communicate; integrated-skills work helps them use information across modes; explicit language teaching supports accuracy; and differentiated scaffolds widen participation. Games and digital tools can increase practice opportunities, but their value depends on alignment, accessibility, and assessment. Individual differences in working memory

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

and language aptitude further support flexible pacing and multiple routes into a task (Mammadova, 2025).

The three specified sources contribute complementary perspectives. Babayev (2022) foregrounds relationships among skills and traditional teaching methods; Sadiqzade and Alisoy (2024) offer a game-based approach across student levels; and Mammadova (2025) highlights individual differences in L2 processing. Used together with the military-specific literature, they support a curriculum that balances structured instruction, interactive practice, and learner-sensitive support. Their contribution should be interpreted according to each work's scope and design, rather than taken as direct evidence that a particular intervention will produce professional advancement.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This article is a narrative synthesis and has not collected new data from cadets or instructors. Its selected sources differ in country, institution, learner age, methodology, and research purpose. Some address military English directly, whereas others examine broader language-learning strategies or individual differences. Consequently, the proposed framework is a set of evidence-informed instructional recommendations, not a validated intervention model.

Future studies could test the framework in a clearly defined military-academy context using mixed methods. Researchers might examine whether a needs-based, scenario-supported course improves performance on selected speaking, listening, reading, or writing tasks; how outcomes vary by initial proficiency; and which scaffolds support participation. Studies should avoid equating self-reported confidence with language proficiency, and should distinguish educational outcomes from later career outcomes. Longitudinal evidence would be needed before making claims about promotion, operational effectiveness, or career progression.

8. Conclusion

English-language competence can support military cadets' personal development and professional preparation when instruction connects language learning to real communicative needs. The reviewed literature supports needs analysis, integrated-skills practice, intercultural and interpersonal communication, differentiated instruction, purposeful use of games and technology, and assessment that captures individual performance. A practical curriculum can combine explicit teaching with realistic, low-risk communication tasks and repeated feedback.

The central recommendation is to treat military English as a learner-centered form of professional language education: relevant to cadets' futures, grounded in measurable language outcomes, and responsive to different starting points. The proposed cycle offers a framework for course planning, but its effectiveness should be evaluated empirically in specific institutions and learner groups.

Declarations

Ethical Approval: This study is a critical narrative review based on published scholarly sources. No human participants were involved and no operationally sensitive material is reported. All sources are appropriately cited.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability: All sources analysed in this review are publicly available and listed in the references.

Author Contributions: R. Zulfiqarova: conceptualization, literature review, and drafting. K. Musayeva: analysis, instructional framework, and revision. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

References

Ab. Rahman, N. K., Md Yunus, M., Mohamad Nasri, N., & Abd Rahman, E. (2023). Proficiency preparedness in defence workforce: A survey of cadet officers' English language needs. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 22*(11), 96–115. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.11.6

Alqahtani, A. F. (2018). English language learning motivation and English language learning anxiety in Saudi military cadets: A structural equation modelling approach. *Arab World English Journal, 9*(3), 45–60. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no3.4

Alqahtani, A. F. (2023). Willingness to communicate and English language proficiency in Saudi military cadets: A structural equation modelling approach. *Migration Letters, 20*(6), 395–404. https://doi.org/10.59670/ml.v20i6.3491

Babayev, J. (2022). About the correlation of language skills on the basis of traditional methods. In *Proceedings of the Republican Scientific Conference on the Unity of Traditionality and Modernity in Foreign Language Teaching and Research* (Nakhchivan).

Bjornestad, A., Olson, S., & Weidauer, L. (2021). Improving officer-soldier communication through active listening skills training with Army ROTC cadets. *Military Psychology, 33*(3), 205–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2021.1902179

Chan, S. C., & Lo, N. L. (2024). Enhancing EFL/ESL instruction through gamification: A comprehensive review of empirical evidence. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, 1395155. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1395155

Diana, L., & Aryana, I. P. A. (2025). Diving into language needs: A needs analysis for submarine cadets English workbook. *TELL: Teaching of English Language and Literature Journal, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.30651/tell.v13i1.24631

Liu, S., Zhang, S., & Dai, Y. (2025). Do mobile games improve language learning? A meta-analysis. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2025.2528786

Mammadova, I. (2025). Individual differences in L2 processing: The role of working memory and aptitude in online form recognition. *Global Spectrum of Research and Humanities, 2*(6), 7–24. https://doi.org/10.69760/gsrh.0250206001

Orna-Montesinos, C. (2018). Language practices and policies in conflict: An ELF perspective on international military communication. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca, 7*(1), 89–111. https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2018-0004

Sadiqzade, Z., & Alisoy, H. (2024). Level-up learning: Using games to teach English across student levels. *Euro-Global Journal of Linguistics and Language Education, 1*(3), 181–194. https://doi.org/10.69760/egjlle.20240104

Siegel, A., Vance, M., & Nilsson, D. (2025). Military English language education: A scoping review of 30 years of research. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 19*(5), 433–451. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2024.2370986

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**

Siraranghom, W. (2020). The needs of air cadets in an English speaking course. *The New English Teacher, 14*(2).

Sovhar, O. M. (2021). Using ICT to form foreign language communicative competence of future Armed Forces officers. *Information Technologies and Learning Tools, 85*(5), 259–269. https://doi.org/10.33407/itlt.v85i5.4442

Sung, K., Yang, S., & Jung, H. (2016). A study on military cadets' curricular satisfaction, their needs for ESP, and the future use of English. *Modern English Education, 17*(1), 89–115. https://doi.org/10.18095/meeso.2016.17.1.05

Authors	**Rena Zulfiqarova** English Teacher, Department of Foreign Languages Military Institute named after Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0351-4731 **Khatira Musayeva** English Teacher, Department of Foreign Languages Military Institute named after Heydar Aliyev, Azerbaijan ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7102-7804

Received: 08.09.2026
Revised: 15.09.2026
Accepted: 07.11.2026
Published: 08.11.2026

This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License **ISSN 3078-6177**