

Bridging the Gap: Unveiling Business English Needs through a Needs Analysis of Malaysian Polytechnic Students

Nurhafizah Yahaya¹, Nuraqilah Nadjwa Miskam²

¹Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, ²Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Email: nurhafizah85@graduate.utm.my, nuraqilahnadjwa@utm.my

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Abstract

The skills to communicate effectively in English language are crucial in the business industry. However, employees still experience communicative apprehension despite being exposed to the language from an early age. By employing descriptive quantitative method, this study aims to explore English language needs of business students in Malaysian polytechnics. The needs analysis includes their current English language proficiency, areas of improvement, preferences, and training needs. The findings indicated that polytechnic students have an average proficiency in English, with a strong desire to enhance their speaking skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. There were some challenges identified when learning business English such as difficulties with business terminology, expressing opinions, using tenses correctly, and building communication confidence. The polytechnic students showed a keen interest in English for Specific Purposes courses tailored to practical workplace scenarios such as client interactions, business vocabulary usage, presentations, and negotiation skills. This study provides recommendations that include emphasising speaking skills in ESP courses, aligning course materials with students' proficiency levels, and introducing a Situational Syllabus to address specific linguistic requirements for the business field. The study highlighted the significance of catering English language needs of business students to improve their employability and success in the business sector.

Keywords: Bridging, Gap, Unveiling Business English, Needs Analysis, Malaysian Polytechnic Students

Introduction

Malaysia aims to be a prosperous country by 2030 through sustainable economic growth and fair economic distribution to its citizens at various levels of revenue clusters and supply chains. To achieve this aim, Malaysia emphasises the business sector regardless of its scale size from micro-enterprises up to mega-conglomerate companies as the means to boost the economy. The essential to business expansion is connections to the global market which requires the proficiency of the English language as the lingua franca of the world. English is proven to have a direct impact on the nation's economic development (Li et al., 2022).

Therefore, many companies use English as their medium of communication among staff and clients. In addition, employers also look at the proficiency level of the English language when recruiting new talents. According to Ghani Azmi and Che Hashim (2020), employers expect graduates to be proficient in the English language besides their academic excellence and the lack of communication skills is the major factor of unemployment among fresh graduates.

In the context of education, the importance of mastering the English language among school students and university or college graduates is highlighted in Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education). These documents list language proficiency as one of the desirable attributes that students should possess to meet the demands of the competitive global economic environment. Therefore, higher learning institutions need to implement English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in their academic programmes to equip the students with a skill set including sufficient language command as expected by the employers before entering the working world.

Polytechnics which are the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers under the Ministry of Higher Education have undergone a series of transformations in the curriculum. In 2002, English for Technical Purposes was implemented for students from technical academic programmes, and English for Commercial Purposes was introduced to students from business academic programmes. However, the focus has shifted to Communicative English across all disciplines since 2010 in line with the current trends. Industries employees nowadays stress on the quality of graduates to communicate well in English including speaking fluently if they want to get employment and progress in their careers (Nesaratnam et al., 2020). The revamp in the syllabus involves a change of approach to enable the students to communicate effectively in various social interactions and the workplace context by integrating English for Specific Purposes with English for General Purposes in the syllabus.

The selected polytechnic for this study was established more than 20 years ago and offered academic programmes that meet the real needs of education and the working world through an industry-led curriculum. The institution has achieved high graduate employability rates which reflect their success in producing quality and competent graduates. At present, this polytechnic offers at least 16 academic programmes including business at certificate, diploma, and bachelor's degree levels. This polytechnic uses the English language as the medium of instruction except for certain subjects such as General Studies courses or *Mata Pelajaran Umum* (MPU) like *Kursus Integriti Anti Rasuah*, *Bahasa Kebangsaan A*, moral education, *Penghayatan Etika dan Peradaban*, *Nilai Masyarakat dalam Islam*, and *Sains, Teknologi dan Kejuruteraan dalam Islam*. This study focuses on business students at the diploma level because this sector has shown a strong need for English language proficiency to perform corporate tasks. Therefore, this study aims to explore the English language needs of business students in a polytechnic.

Statement of the Problem

In the business sector, the skills to communicate effectively in the English language are essential to build rapport with the stakeholders and be persuasive in winning business contracts. Unfortunately, employees still have communicative apprehension when using English in the workplace, especially during communicative events that involve speaking such

as oral presentation and conversation (Mat Husin, 2022). This situation occurs because speaking to others, especially strangers, and with the presence of judgment would normally create anxiety. This issue could be addressed by implementing English of Specific Purposes where the focus of ESP is on improving English proficiency based on workplace context.

In Malaysia, polytechnics are the biggest workforce contributors to the industries. They need to equip students with English language needs for specific disciplines as different fields have special registers that include terminology, jargon, and lexicon for the students to perform working tasks smoothly. Thus, it is impossible to generalise the same English syllabus to all academic programmes. Apart from that, diploma students in polytechnics have limited English classroom practices of the English language as they only take English courses for three semesters throughout their study period. Hamdani and Ouchmiche (2022) found that English courses that the students had during their tertiary education failed to meet their academic and professional needs, and speaking is the most desired language skill yet a problematic aspect of communication. This situation worsens when the process of curriculum review done by the polytechnics through the Curriculum Division at headquarters involves taking inputs from the academicians and industry players without conducting informed needs assessments on students. Therefore, needs analysis should be done to obtain direct views of the students' actual needs of the English language.

Despite the global recognition of the need for English language proficiency in the business field, there is a scarcity of research conducted on the needs of business students in Malaysian polytechnics.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the present English language ability of business students.
2. To identify the lacks faced by business students in using English.
3. To investigate the English language training wants of business students.

Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

The rapid growth and constant progress of technology and commerce fields at the end of the Second World War resulted in English as the international language and thus English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged to fulfil the demand of people learning English with specific objectives in economic and social situations such as trading. According to Salmani-Nodoushan (2020), ESP is defined based on the target group's 'purpose' and 'specificity' of learning English. Thus, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an approach to teaching languages where the students' goal of learning informs all technique and content decisions (Robinett, 1988). The students' reason for learning can be determined through a need analysis. Bytyqi (2021) proved that needs analysis is crucial in designing, selecting materials, and improving the impact of learning English for Specific Purposes courses.

Dudley-Evans and Jo (1998), differentiated ESP through absolute characteristics and variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics of ESP include (1) the purpose of designing ESP is to fulfil the students' specific needs; (2) ESP employs the fundamental methodologies and practices of the fields it caters to; and (3) ESP revolves around the appropriate use of language, skills, discourse, and genres for any activities. Meanwhile, the

variable characteristics are (1) ESP can be associated with or tailored for particular fields of study; (2) In certain teaching contexts, ESP may employ a methodology that is different from 'General English'; (3) ESP is mostly catered for adult students such as students at higher education or secondary school, and workers or professionals; and (4) ESP is tailored for students at intermediate or advanced level.

In short, ESP is a specialised approach to language teaching that is meticulously tailored to meet the specific linguistic needs of students in various professional and academic contexts, ensuring optimal language acquisition for their desired purposes.

The Importance of Speaking Skills to Business Students

English language is a tool of communication that helps to bring success to people in various aspects. Wulandari et al. (2019), reported that among the four language skills, ESP students need speaking skills the most and this is also the skill that they need to improve for them to communicate in the English language. According to García (2006), speaking is the hardest language skill to master even though the students have learned the language for a long period of time. In the business context, Rao (2019), also addressed the advantages of speaking skills to excel in job interviews, interact with people around the world, promote and attract clients to buy sale products, perform international business, and increase earnings. Apart from that, good speaking skills are also important for graduates to help them find jobs. A study by Fadhil and Ismail (2021), confirmed that communication skills including speaking are significantly associated with employability. This skill is the critical factor that influences the chances of graduates being employable by their future employees. A similar finding was reported by Ranasuriya and Herath (2020), which showed that the performance of interview candidates among vocational graduates is determined by how well they speak to market themselves during that session regardless of their academic achievement, and thus the lack of speaking skills to exhibit their talents portrays their incompetence to promote the company and its product and inability to communicate among staff will result in their failure to be hired by the industries. In short, these studies suggest that speaking skill is an essential component of ESP education.

Speaking is important to business students as they are frequently asked to present and give a talk in class (Marchis, 2010). Wolverton and Tanner (2019) revealed that business students value speaking skills as they expect more presentations to be given online in the future since it saves money and time, it is important to communicate effectively, and would like to know more about giving business presentations including in virtual platform since they believe they have not prepared themselves sufficiently. Additionally, students in business programmes are introduced to business meetings which require them to be excellent at speaking confidently to address the audience, convey ideas, discuss in groups, exercise persuasion, and show the capacity for spontaneity (Pusparini & Suryatiningsih, 2023). This shows that speaking skills are essential to these students to fulfill various needs.

Orang'i (2021), conducted a study on the target needs of speaking skills for ESP in a Business English programme among tour guide students in Kenya. The data was collected using questionnaires to 72 students and 5 teachers as well as interviews with three employers. The results showed that the most prominent learning needs are on the speaking skills of making inquiries, responding to inquiries, expressing oneself, and responding to speech and

lecture. In addition, the highest-ranked target needs for speaking skills were conversing with native speakers, non-native speakers, and clients, both in work-related settings and in social settings. The researcher concluded that needs analysis ought to be used in the syllabus design of ESP courses so that the syllabus is not built or justified from the researchers' point of view.

Another study done by Sukkrong et. al. (2022), investigated on the need for communication speaking abilities for business English students. Needs analysis which adopted the Oliva Model of curriculum development was done using interview methods with 24 teachers and entrepreneurs, and a questionnaire survey of 132 students from three universities in Thailand. The findings showed that the target needs of the students were to speak about the topics in business areas such as job application and trade, speak using proper language functions for business, and communicate sufficiently in responding to issues in business. The researchers used the needs analysis result to conceptualise a framework and develop a Business English Speaking for Communication Course for business English students. Both studies by Orang'i (2021), and Sukkrong et. al. (2022), highlight the critical role of needs analysis in developing effective Business English-speaking curricula, emphasising the necessity of aligning course content with the specific needs of students.

Needs Analysis

Robinson (1991), has associated ESP with needs analysis because as ESP is viewed as goal-oriented, the course is developed from a needs analysis, which aims to stipulate as accurately as possible what the students have to do through the English language. According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), needs analysis is the method of forming the "what" and "how" of a course. The underpinning aspects of needs analysis studies are Target-Situation Analysis and Present-Situation Analysis.

Target-Situation Analysis

Robinett (1988) defined Target-Situation Analysis in terms of the students' necessities, wants, and lacks. Based on this concept, "necessities" addresses the required language skills that the students need to master to function effectively in the target situation, "want" looks at the students' perception of their own needs, while "lack" refers to the gap that exists between the students' target proficiency level and their current proficiency.

Present-Situation Analysis

Present situation analysis is a way to identify the current skills and language use of the students. In other words, present situation analysis is a framework for understanding the current state of a system or situation for decision-making about the future (Hossain, 2013). Hossain's (2013) specified that the analysis looks at a number of factors in order to identify the key challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed by taking the following steps: (1) identify the key stakeholders involved in the system or situation; (2) collect data about the system or situation through various methods such as interviews, surveys, and documents; (3) analyse data to identify the key trends and pattern; and (5) identify the key challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed. Swales and Jordan (1998) reported that information for this need analysis can be obtained from the students, the academic institution, and the prospective employer. However, the needs of these sources may not necessarily correlate as they might be conflicting and result in negative outcomes (Hutchinson & Waters, 2002). As

such, this study will limit its data gathering to only students to avoid disputes from different groups of people and to meet the aim of the study from the main stakeholder.

Methodology

This study employed descriptive quantitative study to investigate the English language needs of business students in a polytechnic. The participants were chosen using convenience sampling as they are quick, easy, and inexpensive to conduct. The researcher should carefully consider the needs of the study and the characteristics of the population of interest when choosing a sampling method (Babbie, 2010). The participants were chosen from the sixth semester of business programmes in a polytechnic in Selangor because, at the time of this study, the participants are undergoing their industrial training internship and have completed all English courses. Thus, they can reflect and provide mature feedback on their English language target needs that match the real needs of the business industries.

The set of questionnaires that addressed the needs of business students and English language problems was adapted from previous studies (Basturkmen, 2010; Daksayani, 2018). According to Basturkmen (2010), questionnaire surveys are useful for obtaining information fast, from a large number of respondents, and cost-effective. This questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section was on the demographic background of the respondents including gender, age, educational level, and language skills (first and second languages, and overall English language proficiency). The second section was on the English language speaking ability including frequency of use, the context of using the language, learning preference, and opinion on ESP. The third section was on problems in English communication that they faced. The survey featured closed-ended questions in the form of a Likert scale, multiple choice, and checklists. The link to the online questionnaire was sent to the class representatives through a social network application and snowballed to other classmates who were the identified participants of this study. The response rate was high at 90% where 36 of 50 sixth-semester students of business programmes in a polytechnic in Selangor gave their consent to participate and submitted this survey. The data gained from the survey was analysed descriptively using frequency counts and percentages. The results were categorised and presented to answer research questions based on Present Situation Analysis (Hossain, 2013) and Target-Situation Analysis (Robinett, 1988).

Results

Demographic Background

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Students

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	6	16.7
Female	30	83.3
Age		
17-21 years old	31	86.1
22-27 years old	5	13.9
Highest Qualification		
Diploma	36	100
Mother Tongue		
Malay	31	86.1
Mandarin	2	5.6
Tamil	3	8.3
Other Language (s) Spoken		
Malay	4	11.1
English	32	88.9

Table 4.1 indicates that majority of the students, 30 (83.3%) were female while the minority of 6 (16.7%) were males. Of the 36 students, 31 (86.1%) were in the 17 to 21 age group, 5 (13.9%) were in the 22 to 27 age group, and all of them 36 (100%) had a diploma as their highest academic qualification.

Of all the students, 31 (86.1%) declared Malay as their native language, 3 (8.3%) said Tamil as their first language, and 2 (5.6%) claimed Mandarin as their mother tongue. In terms of additional language acquisition, 32 (88.9%) said that their second language was English. Despite none of the students having English as their first language, 4 (11.1%) students said they could speak Malay in addition to their native tongue.

Students' Present-Situation Analysis

In this section, the students were required to rate their English language abilities and usage.

Table 2

Students' Self-Rating of Their Current Ability in English Language Skills

Self-Rated English Proficiency	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Excellent	2	5.6
Good	13	36.1
Average	21	58.3
Poor	0	0
Very Poor	0	0

Table 2 demonstrates the students' self-rating of their current ability in English Language Skills. The students' responses indicated that their English language skills range from average to excellent. The majority of students, 21 (58.3%) self-rated their English language competency as average, 13 (36.1%) as good, and only 2 (5.6%) as excellent.

Table 3

The Use of English in Daily Conversation

Use of English in Daily Conversation	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always	3	8.3
Sometimes	22	61.1
Seldom	6	16.7
Rarely	5	13.9
Never	0	0

Table 3 illustrates the students' use of English in their daily conversation. The results indicated that 3 (8.3%) students always use English in their daily conversation, 22 (61.1%) students sometimes use English, 6 (16.7%) seldom use English and 5 (13.9%) rarely use English in their daily conversation.

Table 4

The Use of English-Speaking Skills During Industrial Training

Use of English-Speaking Skills During Industrial Training	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
With Clients	22	61.1	14	38.9
With Industrial Supervisor	20	55.6	16	44.4
With Colleagues	18	50	18	50.0
With Lecturers	14	38.9	22	61.1

Table 4 presents the use of English-speaking skills during industrial training. The majority of students, 22 (61.1%) used English language to converse with their clients, 20 students (55.6%) used English to converse with their industrial supervisors, and 18 students (50%) used English to converse with their colleagues during their industrial training. However, only 14 (38.9%) students used English as the medium to converse with their lecturers, during this period of time.

Table 5

Students' Self-Rating of Their Current Spoken English Language Skills and Sub-skills

Competency level of Speaking Skills and Sub-skills	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Speaking Fluency		
Poor	0	0
Fair	2	5.5
Average	20	55.6
Good	14	38.9
Excellent	0	0
Vocabulary		
Poor	0	0
Fair	0	0
Average	28	77.8
Good	8	22.2
Excellent	0	0
Pronunciation		
Poor	0	0
Fair	1	2.8
Average	18	50.0
Good	12	33.3
Excellent	5	13.9
Grammar		
Poor	0	0
Fair	3	8.4
Average	25	69.4
Good	7	19.4
Excellent	1	2.8

Table 5 illustrates students' self-rating of their current spoken English language skills and sub-skills. As shown in Table 5 above, only 14 (38.9%) out of 36 students rated that they are fluent in speaking English, while majority of the students (55.6%) rated themselves as average, and 5.6% as poor. In terms of vocabulary, 8 (22.2%) students rated their vocabulary skills as good while the remaining 28 (77.8%) students rated their vocabulary ability as average. For pronunciation, half of the students rated their pronunciation ability as average, 33.3% as good, 13.9% as excellent, and 2.8% as fair. Of all the students, only 1 student or 2.8% rated themselves as having an excellent command of grammar in spoken language. 7 (19.4%) students rated themselves as good and the majority of the students (69.4%) have average spoken grammar ability while 3 (8.3%) students claimed that they have poor command of grammar in spoken language. Overall, the students' responses indicated that their speaking skills in the English language are average in terms of fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.

Students' Target-Situation Analysis*Students' Lacks in English Language Skills*

Table 6

Students' Lacks in English Language Skills and Subskills

Students' Lacks in the English Language Skills and Subskills	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Speaking Skills	35	97.2	1	2.8
Writing Skills	34	94.4	2	5.6
Listening Skills	31	86.1	5	13.9
Reading Skills	30	83.4	6	16.6
Vocabulary sub-skill	35	97.2	1	2.8
Grammar sub-skill	35	97.2	1	2.8
Pronunciation sub-skill	34	94.4	2	5.6

Table 6 shows the findings where the students indicated which language skills and sub-skills they perceived they were lacking. It was found that the skills that the majority of students lacked were speaking and writing, with responses of 97.2% and 94.4% respectively. In comparison, they also lacked of listening and reading skills but less prominent then the two skills mentioned earlier with agreed responses of 86.1% and 83.4%. In addition, they also agreed to be seriously lacking of speaking sub-skills including vocabulary and grammar (97.2%), as well as pronunciation (94.4%).

Table 7

Students' Functional Lacks During Industrial Training

Problems Faced by Students During Industrial Training (Lacks)	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Familiarity with business terms – specialist vocabulary	28	77.7	8	22.9
Difficulty in voicing my opinion in English	27	75	9	25
Differentiating English tenses in a sentence	26	72.2	10	27.8
Code-switching when speaking in English	26	72.2	10	27.8
Speaking in English spontaneously without thinking about my responses in my mother tongue	25	69.2	11	30.8
Speaking in English confidently	24	66.7	12	33.3

Convey messages in English (spoken)	24	66.7	12	33.3
Appropriate words to use while speaking in English	24	66.7	12	33.3
Understanding colleague's and supervisor's English pronunciation	15	41.7	21	58.3
Understanding colleague's spoken instruction given in English	14	38.9	22	61.1
Understanding the supervisor's spoken instruction given in English	13	36.1	23	63.9

Table 7 presents the lacks of necessities that the students were facing during their industrial internship. "Necessities" in Target-Situation Analysis addresses the required language skills that the students need to master in order to function effectively in the target situation. However, the findings revealed that when performing their job scope, a wide majority of 28 (77.7%) students lack and have difficulty to familiarise themselves with business terms, 27 (75%) students faced problems in voicing their opinion in English, 26 (72.2%) students faced issues in differentiating English tenses, and code-switching, as well as 25 (69.2%) students were struggling in speaking English spontaneously without thinking their responses in the mother tongue. In addition, other oral communication lacks that are challenging to a large number of students (66.7%) include speaking in English confidently, conveying messages in spoken English, and using appropriate words while speaking in English of similar response scores. On the other hand, minority of students stated that their English language lacks in understanding their colleague's and supervisor's pronunciation (41.7%), colleague's spoken instruction (38.9%), and supervisor's spoken instruction (36.1%), making these the least emphasis of their lacks based on the problems that they faced during industrial training.

Student's Wants in English Language Training

Table 8

Students' Wants in Language Training Scope

Language Training Scope	Agree		Disagree	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
English for Specific Purposes course	34	94.4	2	5.6
Making polite conversations with clients	35	97.2	1	2.8
Dealing with clients' objections	35	97.2	1	2.8
Business terms – specialist vocabulary	35	97.2	1	2.8
Giving oral presentations	34	94.4	2	5.6
Participating in group discussion	33	91.6	3	8.4
Communicating via telephone	33	91.6	3	8.4
Face-to-face negotiation	32	88.9	4	11.1

Table 8 presents the students' wants for language training. Based on the table above, 34 (94.4%) students showed strong interest in receiving English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. In terms of the specific content of ESP speaking skills, 35 (97.2%) students focused on wanting to make polite conversation with clients, dealing with clients' objections, and acquiring business terms or specialist vocabulary. Meanwhile, 34 (94.4%) students stated their specific speaking wants in giving oral presentations, 33 (91.6%) students want to participate in group discussions and communicate via telephone, and the least is on face-to-face negotiation (88.9%).

Table 9

Students' Wants in Language Training Frequency

Language Training Frequency	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Everyday	0	0
Every 2 days	8	22.2
3 to 4 times a week	10	27.8
Once a week	17	47.2
Two days a week	1	2.8

Table 9 illustrates the students' wants in language training frequency. The results revealed that students have mixed perceptions towards the frequency of attending language training to fulfill their English language needs. Almost half of the students, (49.2%), recommended the language training to be conducted once a week, 27.8% preferred 3 to 4 times a week, 22.2% preferred every 2 days, and only 2.8% wished for the training to be conducted 2 days a week.

Table 10

Students' Wants in Language Training Activities

Language Training Activities	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Individually	13	36.1
In pairs	14	38.9
In small groups of 3 to 5	28	77.8
In big groups of more than 5 people	5	13.9

Table 10 demonstrates the students' wants in language training activities. The majority of students (77.8%) wanted activities in the ESP course to be done in small groups of 3 to 5 people, 38.9% wanted it to be done in pairs, and 13.9% wanted activities be conducted in big groups of more than 5 people. The remaining 36.1% preferred individual work.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the English language needs of polytechnic business students, highlighting both their present situation analysis of proficiency levels and their target situation analysis in terms of English language lacks and wants for language improvement through training. The analysis reveals that students possess an average level of English proficiency due to their occasional use of this language. Thus, they express a strong desire to enhance their speaking skills, which they consider crucial for their future careers in the business sector. This aligns with previous research indicating that effective communication is a key competency in the workplace (Wolverton & Tanner, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2019).

One of the most significant findings is that students identified their primary challenges in the mastery of speaking, vocabulary and grammar skills of the English language, which include a lack of familiarity with business terminology, difficulties in voicing opinions, and issues with code-switching and impromptu speech. These communicative lacks could hinder students from performing well in their classroom tasks and business requirements (Pusparini & Suryatiningsih, 2023). Hence, these challenges reflect the need for a curriculum that not only focuses on general English language skills but also incorporates specialised vocabulary and situational practice relevant to business contexts (Ranasuriya & Herath, 2020). The emphasis on business-specific language skills suggests that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses should be designed to address these gaps, providing students with the tools they need to communicate effectively in professional settings.

Additionally, this study disclosed that the majority of students' wants in English language training to include communicating sufficiently in responding to issues and conversing with clients, both in work-related settings and in social settings. This finding is in line with the previous studies by Orang'i (2021), Sukkrong et al. (2022) and Wulandari et al. (2019) which represent universal demands for competent speaking ability among business students. Moreover, the preference for small group activities indicates that students value collaborative learning environments where they can practice speaking in a supportive setting. This preference should inform the design of ESP courses, as small group interactions can foster confidence which is essential for language acquisition (Pusparini & Suryatiningsih, 2023). The findings suggest that by incorporating role-playing, simulations, and real-life business

scenarios into the curriculum could enhance students' speaking abilities and prepare them for actual workplace interactions.

In essence, this study accentuates the critical need for ESP courses that are responsive to the specific language needs of business students. By prioritising speaking skills, integrating specialised vocabulary, and fostering collaborative learning environments, educators can better prepare students for the demands of the business world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the needs of polytechnic business students in terms of their present situation of English language abilities and target needs of English language speaking skills wants, lacks, and training preferences. The results showed that students' current proficiency in the English language may be classified as average with occasional use of English mostly with clients, supervisors, and colleagues. Additionally, students believe that speaking is one of the most crucial abilities that they need to improve along with sub-skills of vocabulary, and grammar. It is discovered that students' primary concerns regarding their lacks of English Language speaking skills are related to familiarity with business terms (specialist vocabulary), voicing an opinion, differentiating English tenses, code-switching, impromptu speech, confidence, conveying messages, and appropriate word usage. It is evident that students place a high value on English for Specific Purposes courses as their want to address their lacks. Hence, they want the course to adhere to their workplace functions of making polite conversation with clients, dealing with objections, using business vocabulary, giving oral presentations, participating in group discussions, communicating via telephone, and dealing with face-to-face negotiation. Their preference of the training frequencies differs but the majority wanted the course to be conducted once a week while the activities be done in small groups.

In light of the results, this study proposed that (i) speaking abilities should be prioritised more in ESP courses, (ii) the skill level of the students should be taken into consideration when preparing or designing course materials, (iii) the Situational Syllabus should be introduced where the activities are created around various scenarios and linguistic requirements relevant to a particular scenario, like participating in business negotiation and using correct tenses, and (iv) specialised training and abilities are necessary for English language lecturers to fulfill the demands of business students, such as business terms or specialist vocabulary. Nevertheless, the research tool and sample population used in this study are some of its limitations. Questionnaires were the sole instrument utilised to gather data. As a result, the responses obtained were completely dependent upon students' perceptions. For further studies, it could be improved by adopting interviews, document analysis, and tests to gain a better understanding of students' present language abilities and for triangulation. The population of the students could also be widened to include other polytechnics in Malaysia that offer business programmes for generalisation of findings. In short, the current study investigated the English language needs of business students at a polytechnic. The results of the study are hoped to provide insights to the stakeholders such as the Curriculum Division in curriculum and syllabus revision, as well as educators in planning their lessons.

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