

Exploring Business English Course Needs: Students' Views on Types and Difficulty Levels

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ABSTRACT

Business English is an important course designed to prepare students to engage in professional settings where English is needed. Tailoring the course materials to meet real-world demands is, therefore, essential. One of the ways is to conduct a needs analysis, the results of which will be the basis of the course syllabus and material development. This study explores Business English students' perceptions of the course needs, specifically the types and difficulty levels, in the context of North Bali. The study employed a mixed-methods design by disseminating a questionnaire to 132 respondents and conducting a semi-structured interview with 15 respondents. The findings indicated that the students perceived that all listed needs should be included in the materials. Regarding the degree of difficulty, students found tasks such as reading contracts/agreements, writing contracts/agreements and business emails, listening to social meetings and negotiations, speaking in face-to-face meetings and negotiations, and implementing etiquette in dining and social talks to be challenging. In addition, translating contracts/agreements was also perceived as a difficult task.

Keywords: Business English, needs analysis, North Bali students

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the crucial role of Business English courses in preparing Balinese students for workplace communication, several instructional issues persist. Observations and interviews at a State University in North Bali revealed that current learning materials do not align with industry needs. These materials, sourced mainly from books and

the internet, lack a needs analysis that considers learners' perspectives and do not adequately cover the four language skills or business manners. Consequently, students are unprepared for real workplace tasks, requiring additional time and training.

Addressing these issues is urgent, starting with a needs analysis involving Business English learners. Such analysis ensures that the curriculum is relevant and meets students' business communication needs, enhancing learning efficiency and motivation (Brown, 2016; Graves, 2000; Li, 2014; Nicol, 2021; Nychkalo et al., 2020). A task-based needs analysis will reflect real-life tasks students will encounter in the workplace (Long, 2005). Previous studies have identified necessary language skills for Business English but have not addressed task types, difficulty levels, or business etiquette (Farani & Yustisia, 2021; Lasekan et al., 2023). This research aims to fill that gap by examining North Bali students' perceptions of Business English task needs, including language skills, translating/interpreting, and business etiquette. As North Bali grows as a tourist destination, this analysis will inform updates to the course syllabus and materials, incorporating input from business professionals, lecturers, and department heads. The revised syllabus will sequence tasks better and allocate more time for challenging areas.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the critical importance of Business English courses in equipping students in Bali with the necessary skills for effective workplace communication, current instructional practices fall short of meeting industry needs. The learning materials used in these courses are primarily sourced from books and the internet without a comprehensive needs analysis that includes learners' perspectives. As a result, these materials lack exercises in the four essential language skills and omit crucial components such as business manners. Consequently, students are inadequately prepared for real-world tasks, necessitating additional time and training to meet workplace demands. This gap highlights the urgent need for a curriculum that is both relevant and aligned with the specific communication needs of students entering the business world.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can a task-based needs analysis be utilized to develop Business English course materials that effectively address the language skill requirements and business etiquette needs of students in North Bali, ensuring their preparedness for real-world business communication tasks?

The study employs a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. It used a survey with a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire included 11 demographic questions and 47 items assessing the needs for Business English materials.

The study reveals students' perceived needs and challenges in Business English courses across various skills, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, translation, interpreting, and business etiquette. In reading, students identified tasks such as reading memos, proposals, reports, and business emails as necessary, emphasizing the need for exposure to authentic business texts and terminology (Smith et al., 2021). Writing tasks, including memos and reports, were also deemed important, with students highlighting the need to learn text formats and design aspects (Alhassan, 2021). Listening tasks, such as meetings and negotiations, require exposure to different accents and strategies to improve weak listening skills (Nichols & Straus, 2021). Speaking tasks, including meetings and presentations, were seen as crucial, with students noting the importance of non-verbal communication and confidence (Suban, 2021).

Translation and interpreting tasks were also necessary, particularly for business documents (Lyu, 2020). Business etiquette, including dining etiquette and handling complaints, was highlighted as essential for professional interactions (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020). The study also assessed task difficulty, finding that tasks like writing contracts and emails and participating in meetings and negotiations were perceived as challenging due to unfamiliar legal terminology and lack of confidence.

CONCLUSION

This research examines North Bali students' perceptions of Business English task needs. The findings indicated that the students perceived that all listed needs should be included in the materials. In addition, several tasks are perceived as difficult for them. Further material development is encouraged using the results of this study as a basis. It is recommended that lecturers integrate real-life scenarios, authentic business texts, and interactive learning methods in their developed materials.

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