

PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF BUSINESS ENGLISH LEARNING: A CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITAS CATUR INSAN CENDEKIA

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Abstract

This study focuses on how fourth semester students in the Faculty of Economics and Business at Universitas Catur Insan Cendekia (UCIC) perceive about the English for Business course. Employing a qualitative descriptive method that includes both closed-ended and open-ended surveys, the research explores the difficulties encountered by students, the advantages they recognize, and their recommendations for enhancing the course. The analysis highlighted recurring challenges that include a restricted range of vocabulary, hesitation in oral communication, and nervousness during presentations. Additionally, students report feeling more driven, speaking more fluently, and having improved communication skills. Feedback from the students highlighted the need for more practical assignments, digital learning resources, hands-on learning opportunities, and real-world career-relevant content. These results highlight the need for learner-centered, adaptive ESP instruction that promotes academic growth and career readiness.

Keywords: *English for Business, Learning Challenges and Benefits, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Students' Perceptions.*

Sari

Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana mahasiswa semester empat di Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis Universitas Catur Insan Cendekia (UCIC) memandang mata kuliah *English for Business*. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif yang mencakup survey terbuka, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi kesulitan yang dihadapi mahasiswa, manfaat yang mereka rasakan, serta rekomendasi mereka untuk meningkatkan kualitas perkuliahan. Hasil analisis menunjukkan adanya tantangan berulang seperti keterbatasan

kosakata, keraguan dalam komunikasi lisan, dan rasa gugup saat presentasi. Selain itu, mahasiswa melaporkan bahwa mereka merasa lebih termotivasi, berbicara dengan lebih lancar, dan memiliki kemampuan komunikasi yang meningkat. Masukan dari mahasiswa menyoroti perlunya lebih banyak tugas praktis, sumber belajar digital, kegiatan pembelajaran bahasa berbasis praktik, serta materi yang relevan dengan dunia kerja nyata. Hasil ini menegaskan pentingnya pembelajaran *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)* yang adaptif, yang berpusat pada peserta didik guna mendorong pertumbuhan akademik dan persiapan karier.

Kata kunci: *English for Business, Tantangan dan Manfaat Pembelajaran, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Persepsi Mahasiswa*

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Introduction

In today's globalized economy, the ability to communicate in English is particularly within business contexts has become a crucial skill for university students in non-English majors such as economics and business. As English continues to dominate international markets, professional communication skills are increasingly emphasized in higher education to prepare students for global work environments (Nickerson, 2022). Courses like *English for Business* are designed to support this need by equipping students with practical language competencies such as business writing, oral presentations, negotiations, and professional correspondence. According to Solihah et al. (2023), students could study ESP and then use it to master the subject in different ways based on their major. In other words, ESP means learning the abilities you need for a certain job, subject, or location of employment

However, despite the relevance of such courses, students often face multiple challenges in mastering business English. These difficulties may include limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with business discourse, low confidence in speaking, and a lack of exposure to authentic business contexts. As Evans (2018) points out, "*students frequently struggle to transfer general English knowledge to business-specific situations, which demand a unique set of pragmatic and lexical skills.*" Moreover, even

when students recognize the relevance of the course, they may still encounter barriers in fully engaging with or benefiting from it.

On the other hand, research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has shown that students also perceive various benefits from learning business English, such as increased confidence, enhanced employability, and improved communication abilities (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2022). These positive perceptions are essential indicators of course effectiveness. Understanding students' experiences can help educators evaluate and refine course content and pedagogy to meet learners' needs more effectively.

In the context of Universitas Catur Insan Cendekia (UCIC), where *English for Business* is part of the curriculum for fourth-semester students in the Faculty of Economics and Business, there has been limited investigation into how students perceive the course. Exploring their perceived challenges and benefits can offer valuable insights for improving both teaching strategies and learning outcomes. As Basturkmen (2020) emphasizes, “*ESP course design must be grounded in learners' needs and real-world communication demands to ensure its relevance and success.*”

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the perceived challenges and benefits of learning *English for Business* among fourth-semester students at UCIC. It aims to:

- (1) identify the major difficulties students encounter during the course,
- (2) describe the benefits students perceive after taking the course, and
- (3) provide constructive input for curriculum developers and educators to enhance the course delivery.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' perceived challenges and benefits in learning *English for Business*. The participants were selected purposively from fourth-semester students in the Faculty of Economics and Business at Universitas Catur Insan Cendekia (UCIC), all of whom had completed the *English for Business* course. A total of 95 students from three study programs, Business Management, Accounting, and Management were involved in this research. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires, allowing students to express their perceptions, difficulties, and reflections in their own words. This method was

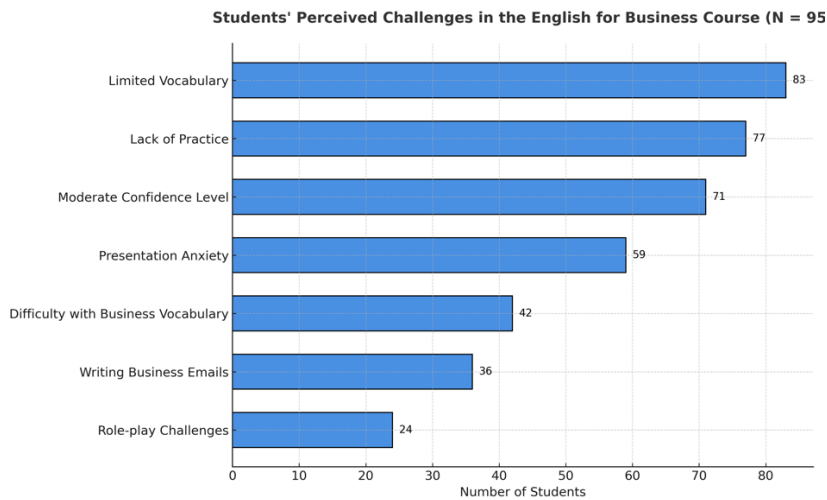
chosen to gain rich, detailed insights into students' learning experiences, which are essential in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The questions focused on key areas such as course relevance, language difficulties, confidence, and perceived skill improvement. The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), which involves coding, categorizing, and interpreting patterns across the data. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality. This methodological approach is particularly suitable for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research, where learner perceptions are central to understanding the effectiveness of instructional practices (Basturkmen, 2020; Hyland & Wong, 2023).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the qualitative analysis of students' experiences in the English for Business course. Through open-ended questionnaire responses gathered from 95 fourth-semester students in the Faculty of Economics and Business at Universitas Catur Insan Cendekia, valuable insights were obtained regarding their perceptions, challenges, and overall learning experiences. The responses reveal various aspects of student engagement and highlight specific areas where learners face difficulties, providing a comprehensive understanding of the course's impact. These findings serve as a foundation for identifying key challenges and informing strategies for course improvement.

1. Major Difficulties Student Encounter During the Course

The analysis of student responses provides a comprehensive picture of the main obstacles they experienced while engaging with the English for Business course. The findings are organized thematically and enriched with direct student quotes to provide depth and authenticity to the qualitative insights. According to Hyland and Wong (2023), students in ESP courses often experience difficulty in applying language knowledge in authentic, domain-specific contexts, particularly when the course content involves professional genres such as presentations, reports, or negotiations. This aligns with the findings from this study.



Graph. 1. Challenges in the English for Business Course

a. Limited Vocabulary

The most frequently reported difficulty was limited vocabulary, particularly when students were expected to use formal or technical business terms. A large portion of students indicated they felt unprepared when asked to speak or write using unfamiliar expressions.

“There were some situations where I felt unprepared or confused. For example, during group discussions or roleplay activities, I sometimes didn't fully understand the instructions or wasn't sure about the vocabulary I needed to use.” – Student 10

“It's very difficult to understand because the use of English in business is different from English in general.” – Student 16

As noted by Basturkmen (2020), learners in ESP contexts often struggle with domain-specific lexis due to lack of exposure and contextualized use, especially when the vocabulary diverges from general English. This challenge suggests that while students may be familiar with conversational English, business communication requires exposure to more nuanced and context-specific language, which they are still developing.

b. Lack of Practice

Many students cited insufficient practice opportunities, particularly in real-life or simulated business contexts, as a major obstacle to building confidence and fluency.

Student 1 said, *“I think the main cause was that the class materials, while good, were sometimes hard to follow regarding cultural nuances of tone. They provided excellent templates, but didn't always deeply explain why one phrase was more appropriate than another in a given context.”* – Student 3

Research by Gollin-Kies et al. (2021) highlights that practice-based learning and immediate feedback are essential for increasing learners’ confidence in professional communication. Without targeted practice, learners tend to retain passive knowledge that does not transfer to real-world use. Without regular, targeted practice and constructive feedback, students found it difficult to internalize appropriate tone, register, and structure in professional communication.

c. Moderate Confidence and Speaking Anxiety

A significant number of students reported having only moderate confidence, particularly in tasks that required live verbal performance, such as presentations and role-plays.

“I felt moderately confident when using English in professional situations during class. While I was improving my pronunciation and business vocabulary, I still needed more practice to speak fluently and respond quickly.” – Student 5

“I get nervous in presentations. It’s hard to speak in a second language in front of people, and I worry about my grammar.” – Student 10

These affective factors such as nervousness, self-consciousness, and fear of making mistakes, acted as internal barriers that limited active participation and performance.

d. Presentation Anxiety

Presentation tasks were among the most frequently mentioned as the most difficult component of the course. Students often experienced nervousness, mental blocks, and difficulty in organizing thoughts while speaking under pressure.

“Delivering an effective presentation involves not only language skills but also public speaking, organizing information, and answering questions. Doing this in English is very hard for me.” – Student 15

This finding suggests that presentation assignments, although pedagogically valuable, need to be scaffolded with supportive preparation, practice, and feedback sessions to ease student anxiety.

e. Other Challenges: Business Writing and Role-Play

In addition to speaking difficulties, students also reported struggles with writing formal business emails and participating in role-play scenarios, which require real-time decision-making and appropriateness in tone.

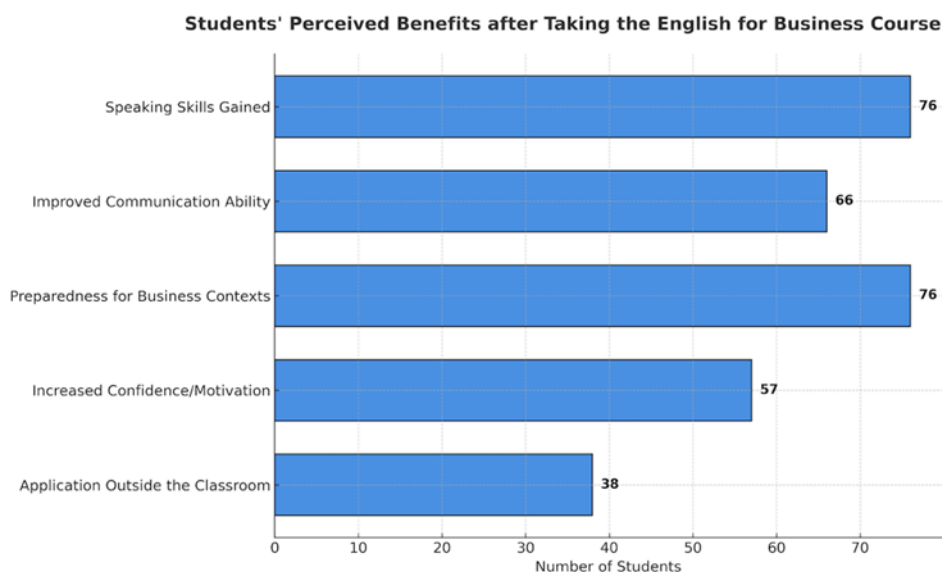
“Writing business emails has many rules, and I’m not sure about tone—whether I sound polite or too direct.” – Student 20

“In role-play, I have to respond immediately and use the right vocabulary, which is hard because I’m still learning pronunciation and expressions.” – Student 8

As Hyland (2019) argues, pragmatic competence in business English—such as adjusting tone, politeness, and clarity—is a complex skill that requires guided exposure and deliberate practice. These tasks require both linguistic competence and pragmatic awareness, underscoring the need for more practice in using English in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

2. Describe the Benefits Students Perceive After Taking the Course

This section explores the benefits students perceived after completing the *English for Business* course. The data, are organized thematically and supported by student reflections to enrich the qualitative analysis. As Hyland (2019) argues, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses must not only address linguistic knowledge but also equip learners with communicative competence relevant to their professional fields. This was evident in students’ reflections, which pointed to both linguistic gains and personal growth.



Graph 2. Benefit after Taking the English for Business Course

a. Speaking Skills Gained

The most widely reported benefit was the improvement in speaking skills, with 76 students highlighting this area. Students noted that consistent exposure to presentation tasks, discussions, and role-plays helped them become more fluent and articulate.

"I am more confident in speaking during class discussions or when giving business presentations. I used to be very shy, but now I feel that I can express my ideas more clearly." – Student 10. This supports Gollin-Kies et al. (2021), who emphasize that oral performance tasks in ESP classes provide essential scaffolding for real-world communication.

b. Preparedness for Business Contexts

Also reported by 76 students, this benefit reflects the relevance of the course to students' future careers. Learners described how they now better understand formal expressions, business etiquette, and communication flow in professional settings.

"I feel more ready to communicate with clients or colleagues if I work in a company later. The course gave me useful phrases for business emails and meetings." – Student 7. As Basturkmen (2020) notes, contextualized instruction that mirrors workplace discourse is vital to building student readiness for professional environments.

c. Improved Communication Ability

66 students indicated they had improved their general communication skills in English. They noted that the course enhanced their ability to explain ideas, interact in group work, and respond appropriately to questions.

"I learned how to respond politely, how to make requests, and how to express opinions more naturally. This helps me not just in English class but also in other courses." – Student 6. This finding is in line with Hyland & Wong (2023), who argue that communication in ESP goes beyond grammar and vocabulary—it requires functional fluency in real-life discourse patterns.

d. Increased Confidence and Motivation

57 students described a noticeable increase in confidence and motivation after completing the course. The ability to perform well in English made them feel more capable and enthusiastic about engaging in professional settings.

"After this class, I feel encouraged to apply for internships where English is used. I'm no longer afraid to try." – Student 2. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), such emotional improvements are crucial, as high confidence and low anxiety promote more effective language acquisition.

e. Application Outside the Classroom

38 students reported that they had already used some of the skills they gained in real-life situations, such as writing emails, joining webinars, or introducing themselves during internships.

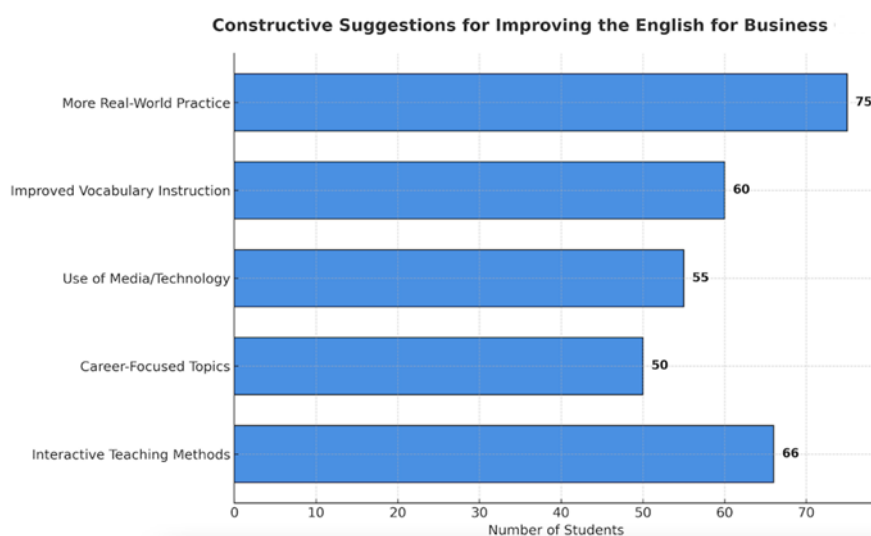
"I wrote my first business email in English during an online workshop registration. It felt great to actually apply what I learned!" – Student 10

This supports the principle that retention is higher when learners see the immediate practicality of what they've learned (Hyland, 2019).

3. Provide Constructive Input for Curriculum Developers and Educators to Enhance the Course Delivery

This section presents students' suggestions and reflections aimed at improving the effectiveness of the *English for Business* course. Data were drawn from both open-

ended and multiple-choice responses provided by 95 fourth-semester students. The analysis reveals several consistent themes related to pedagogy, materials, and relevance, all of which point toward a shared desire for more engaging, contextual, and career-oriented instruction. Related with Solihah (2023), to help students understand ESP, teachers need to design ESP resources and a way of teaching that will help them learn the information as well as possible.



Graph 3. Suggestion for English for Business Curriculum

a. Emphasize Real-World Practice

A prominent recommendation among students was to increase the use of real-life simulations, including writing formal emails, delivering business presentations, and participating in meeting-style conversations. These tasks are considered essential for preparing students to navigate professional English communication with confidence.

"English for Business teaching can be improved by providing more real-life exercises, such as writing formal emails, business presentations, or conversations during meetings." – Student 1. This aligns with Basturkmen (2020), who notes that ESP courses should simulate workplace realities to enhance learners' communicative competence and professional readiness.

b. Improve Vocabulary Instruction

Students emphasized the need for clearer, contextualized instruction in business vocabulary and linking phrases. While many felt the materials were accessible, several noted that they lacked adequate emphasis on essential terminology.

"The material is quite good because it is easy to understand, but there is a lack of attention to the vocabulary that students need to understand." – Student 2.

Hyland (2019) points out that effective ESP vocabulary teaching requires a focus on both formality and function, teaching not only words but how they are used appropriately in context.

c. Innovate with Learning Media and Technology

Students suggested using videos, podcasts, business articles, and interactive platforms (e.g., Zoom simulations, collaborative Google Docs) to create a more engaging, authentic learning experience.

"Teaching should use more English actively and incorporate real case studies, videos, and interactive discussions." – Student 5. This is supported by Gollin-Kies et al. (2021), who argue that multimodal learning fosters greater language retention and learner engagement in ESP contexts.

d. Add Practical, Career-Focused Topics

Students proposed that the course include job interview simulations, CV and cover letter writing, LinkedIn profile development, and personal branding. These topics are seen as essential for their transition into professional roles.

"This activity is very useful because it helps students prepare for the real world of work and trains them to use English in professional situations." – Student 1. Including such content supports Hyland and Wong's (2023) call for ESP curricula to be continually revised in line with evolving workplace demands and learner goals. Because of qualified students may apply for employment opportunities, so one effective method to enhance students preparedness for anticipated performance is through the instruction of English, Kartika (2023).

e. Revise Teaching Methods and Assessment

Students overwhelmingly called for more interactive methods, including group discussions, role-plays, and bootcamp-style simulations. They also recommended project-based assessments over traditional exams.

"Teaching methods should be more interactive, for example through group discussions, role-playing, and business simulations." – Student 3

"A weekly bootcamp model would be more impactful... scenarios like 'Crisis Response' or 'Investor Pitching' will help us act like professionals." – Student 2. According to Cotos (2014), active participation in ESP simulations increases student autonomy and self-efficacy, critical elements in preparing learners for global professional environments.

Conclusion & Recommendation

This study contributes to the growing body of research on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by offering an in-depth account of student experiences in a Business English course situated in a non English major context. The findings underscore the interplay between linguistic proficiency, learner affect, and curriculum design factors that collectively shape students' engagement and learning outcomes.

Rather than treating language instruction as a static transfer of knowledge, this research highlights the importance of adaptive, needs-based pedagogy that recognizes the cognitive and emotional dimensions of language use in professional domains. The use of both structured and open-ended instruments allowed for a nuanced understanding of learners' perceptions, thereby strengthening the validity of the pedagogical insights derived.

For practitioners and curriculum developers, this study offers not only a diagnosis of instructional pain points but also learner-informed recommendations that can be directly translated into course innovation. The emphasis on contextual relevance, task authenticity, and learner agency emerges as a key pedagogical priority.

Future research could extend this inquiry through longitudinal studies or cross-institutional comparisons, particularly to examine how students' business English competencies evolve across academic levels or internships. Such exploration would deepen our understanding of how ESP instruction can be better aligned with dynamic, real-world communication demands.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported.

About Author

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