

Needs Analysis of English for Business Communication in the Maritime and Tourism Industries: A Case Study on Developing Digital-Based ESP Teaching Strategies at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus

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Diterima : 29 September

Direvisi : 07 Oktober

Diterbitkan : 29 Oktober

Abstract

This study investigates the need for English language skills in business communication within the maritime and tourism industries of Labuan Bajo, focusing on the development of digital-based English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching strategies through a case study in the English Terms for Business and Professional course at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus. It addresses challenges faced by 12 first-semester students in distinguishing bargaining (competitive, price-focused) from negotiation (collaborative, value-added), essential for professional communication in maritime contracts and tourism packages. Using a qualitative case study design integrated with action research, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 industry stakeholders and discourse analysis of 10 authentic business documents to identify priority skills, followed by a 4-week trial of a digital ESP module using Zoom simulations and AI chatbots. Results revealed significant improvements: 92% of students correctly differentiated bargaining and negotiation, 75% enhanced their negotiation speaking skills, and 83% improved in business writing. These findings highlight the effectiveness of digital tools in bridging curriculum gaps and aligning vocational education with industry needs in Labuan Bajo's tourism-driven economy.

Keywords: Needs analysis, ESP, business communication, digital-based teaching, vocational education.

INTRODUCTION

Labuan Bajo, a key maritime and tourism hub in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), has experienced rapid growth as a national super-priority tourism destination. Beyond its natural attractions, such as Komodo National Park, the region is enriched by the cultural heritage of the Manggarai community, including traditions like the Ritual *Kepok* (a sincere guest-welcoming ceremony), *Tari Caci* (a symbolic war dance from Melo Village), and intricately woven Manggarai textiles. Local folklore about Komodo dragons and festivals like Golo Koe further enhance its appeal, emphasizing the hospitality integral to sustainable tourism development. Effective communication with international tourists is essential to convey these cultural values, avoid misunderstandings, and foster respectful cultural exchanges, with English proficiency playing a pivotal role.

From a human resources perspective, Labuan Bajo faces challenges in providing skilled professionals for its maritime and tourism sectors. Approximately 75% of local workers operate at the operator level (level 3), with only 25% holding professional certifications, underscoring the urgent need for highly skilled personnel to support the growing influx of tourists. Government initiatives, such as workforce training and promoting local content through small and medium enterprises (SMEs), aim to enhance employability in maritime operations (e.g., shipping) and tourism services (e.g., hotels and tours). However, vocational education in the region struggles with curricula that lack local relevance and limited access to practical skills, contributing to high youth unemployment in NTT. Vocational institutions like Politeknik eLBajo Commodus and local vocational high schools are expected to address these gaps by aligning programs with the maritime and tourism industries, with English proficiency serving as a critical tool to boost local workforce competitiveness.

As the first vocational college in Labuan Bajo, Politeknik eLBajo Commodus (PLC) was established to develop students into work-ready and entrepreneurial professionals, particularly for the region's maritime and tourism-driven economy. The institution offers innovative facilities, such as teaching factories (including a campus hotel, travel agency, restaurant, and mineral processing unit), designed to provide hands-on experience aligned with Industry 4.0 demands. The Applied Bachelor's Program in English for Business and Professional Communication is a flagship program, emphasizing skills like cross-cultural communication, business English, and simultaneous interpreting, which are vital for engaging international tourists in Labuan Bajo.

Within this context, English proficiency for business communication is crucial for vocational graduates, serving as a gateway to interact with international tourists, promote local products, and strengthen the economy through cultural exchange. However, in the English Terms for Business and Professional course at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus, first-semester students often struggle to differentiate bargaining (price-focused, competitive) from negotiation (value-added, collaborative), skills essential for professional communication in maritime contracts and tourism packages. These skills not only facilitate business transactions but also ensure that local cultural values, such as Manggarai hospitality, are effectively conveyed, enhancing workforce quality and tourism sustainability. This study aims to: (1) identify the English language needs in Labuan Bajo's maritime and tourism industries; (2) develop digital-based ESP teaching strategies through a case study; and (3) evaluate their impact on students' understanding. Thus, the research contributes to enhancing vocational human resources aligned with local culture and global industry demands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a language teaching approach tailored to learners' specific professional or academic needs, with needs analysis serving as a cornerstone to align curricula with industry demands. Needs analysis identifies learners' deficiencies (lacks), necessities (needs), and desires (wants), enabling the design of targeted materials for skills like negotiation and business document writing, critical in vocational sectors such as maritime and tourism. In Indonesia, ESP needs analysis studies often highlight gaps between vocational curricula and industry requirements, particularly in polytechnics

targeting tourism and maritime sectors, where English proficiency for business communication is a key determinant of employability.

Challenges in ESP instruction in Indonesia include the lack of authentic, industry-relevant materials, limited digital literacy among students, and difficulties integrating vocational workplace culture, particularly in regions like Labuan Bajo. Research from polytechnics indicates that students struggle to apply ESP due to curricula not fully aligned with industry needs, such as those in business English programs. The *Jurnal Penelitian Terapan Mahasiswa (JPTM)* from Politeknik eLBajo Commodus highlights marketing strategies in tourism that require effective communication, emphasizing the role of language skills in supporting productivity and industry collaboration. Similarly, the *Jurnal Akademisi Vokasi (JAVOK)* explores entrepreneurial motivation and capacity, closely linked to ESP needs analysis for fostering vocational entrepreneurship in tourism and maritime sectors.

Digital tools, such as AI chatbots and virtual reality (VR) simulations, have proven effective in enhancing student engagement and understanding of business concepts in ESP instruction, particularly in vocational settings requiring practical skills. In Indonesia, integrating these technologies addresses the lack of authentic materials, such as business negotiation simulations relevant to tourism, thereby improving graduates' employability. Furthermore, the distinction between bargaining (a competitive, price-focused, win-lose approach) and negotiation (a collaborative, value-added, win-win approach) is often misunderstood by ESP learners, impacting effective professional communication in maritime (e.g., shipping contracts) and tourism (e.g., tour package agreements) contexts. This understanding is critical to avoid cultural miscommunication, especially in Labuan Bajo, where interactions with international tourists require cross-cultural sensitivity. This review underpins the development of needs-based, digital-enhanced ESP teaching strategies at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach through a case study design integrated with action research, enabling in-depth exploration of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching within a vocational context while facilitating iterative improvements in teaching practices. This approach was chosen due to its alignment with the study's focus on addressing the gap between vocational curricula and the needs of Labuan Bajo's maritime and tourism industries. Action research allowed the lecturer-researcher to test and reflect on teaching interventions directly, with the English Terms for Business and Professional course serving as the primary context for identifying students' challenges in business communication. The qualitative case study design provided flexibility to capture contextual nuances, such as students' difficulties in distinguishing bargaining from negotiation, while action research emphasized a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to enhance ESP teaching quality based on real classroom experiences.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative emphasis, where needs analysis served as the initial phase to identify requirements, followed by action research to implement and evaluate interventions. This aligns with ESP research in Indonesian vocational education, which often uses case studies to address specific language needs in maritime and tourism sectors. Data triangulation from multiple sources enhanced the validity and reliability of findings, with the English Terms for Business and Professional

course as the central focus, reflecting real challenges in vocational business communication training.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research context, targeting individuals with direct experience in ESP for business communication in maritime and tourism sectors. The sample included: (1) 12 first-semester students in the English Terms for Business and Professional course at the Applied Bachelor's Program in English for Business and Professional Communication, Politeknik eLBajo Commodus, representing diverse local cultural backgrounds (primarily from NTT) and varying language proficiency levels to capture typical classroom challenges; (2) 5 alumni from other programs at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus (e.g., Hospitality Management and International Marketing Management) with at least one year of work experience in maritime or tourism industries, selected based on program coordinator recommendations to provide practitioner perspectives, as the English program has no alumni yet; and (3) 5 industry stakeholders (e.g., managers or HR personnel from shipping companies and hotels in Labuan Bajo), chosen through campus-industry networks to represent priority local sectors. This small sample size is appropriate for a qualitative case study design, emphasizing depth over quantity, and aligns with similar ESP research in Indonesia, particularly when centered on specific courses like English Terms for Business and Professional.

Data collection instruments included: (1) semi-structured interviews for needs analysis, with question guides covering priority skills such as negotiation and business email writing, recorded with permission and lasting 30-45 minutes per participant; (2) discourse analysis of 10 anonymized authentic business documents (e.g., contract emails and tour package proposals) obtained with company consent to identify language and pragmatic patterns; (3) classroom observations and student task analysis during action research, including field notes and simple pre/post-tests to assess conceptual understanding; and (4) qualitative feedback via open-ended forms from students post-intervention. All instruments were designed to support the focus on the English Terms for Business and Professional course.

The research procedure followed a chronological sequence: (1) a needs analysis phase in the first week, involving interviews with alumni from other programs and stakeholders, and discourse analysis of authentic documents to inform the development of an ESP module; (2) action research through a 4-week trial (September-October 2025) of a digital-based module, incorporating Zoom-based negotiation simulations for maritime contracts or tour packages and AI chatbot exercises to differentiate bargaining (competitive, win-lose) from negotiation (collaborative, win-win), integrated into the English Terms for Business and Professional course; and (3) evaluation through observation, task analysis, and feedback, following standard action research cycles for iterative reflection.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo software, with steps including initial theme identification through transcript and note reviews, data categorization based on patterns (e.g., negotiation needs and digital intervention impacts), coding with thematic labels to group similar data, data reduction to eliminate irrelevant elements, pattern mapping to connect themes related to the English Terms for Business and Professional course, and synthesis to construct a coherent narrative of findings. Reliability was enhanced through peer debriefing and member checking, where participants verified initial interpretations to ensure accurate and accountable analysis.

The study adhered to ethical research principles, obtaining written informed consent from all participants, detailing the study's purpose, risks, and withdrawal rights. Data were anonymized using pseudonyms (e.g., "Student 1" or "Stakeholder A") to protect identities, in line with Indonesian and international research ethics guidelines. Original documents were securely stored for potential journal reviewer verification without publication, and the study received ethical approval from the Politeknik ELBajo Commodus internal ethics committee, given the sensitivity of student and stakeholder data within the English Terms for Business and Professional context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents findings from needs analysis and action research conducted within the *English Terms for Business and Professional* course at the Applied Bachelor's Program in English for Business and Professional Communication, Politeknik eLBajo Commodus, focusing on English language needs for business communication in Labuan Bajo's maritime and tourism industries. The findings were analysed thematically to develop digital-based ESP teaching strategies and interpreted with reference to prior literature to strengthen arguments. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis, classroom observations, student task analysis, and qualitative feedback, emphasizing students' challenges in distinguishing *bargaining* (competitive, win-lose) from *negotiation* (collaborative, win-win) as core business communication skills.

Needs Analysis Results

Semi-structured interviews with 5 industry stakeholders (managers/HR personnel from shipping companies and hotels in Labuan Bajo) revealed that 80% prioritized English negotiation skills, particularly for maritime contracts (e.g., logistics agreements) and tourism transactions (e.g., tour package offerings to international tourists). Business document writing, such as formal emails and proposals, was deemed critical by 60% of stakeholders, emphasizing clear and polite language to maintain professional relationships. Discourse analysis of 10 authentic business documents (contract emails and tour package proposals) identified patterns of collaborative phrases like "mutual benefit" and "propose a solution" in negotiations, alongside formal email structures, highlighting the need for strong pragmatic skills. These findings align with prior Indonesian research emphasizing business communication skills for employability in vocational maritime and tourism sectors. Stakeholders also stressed that English proficiency must be complemented by local cultural sensitivity, such as Manggarai hospitality, to enhance tourist experiences.

Case Study Results

Initial observations of 12 first-semester students in the *English Terms for Business and Professional* course revealed that 10 students (83%) misinterpreted *bargaining* as formal negotiation, often adopting a competitive approach unsuitable for professional contexts like contract negotiations or tour packages. Pre-test task analysis showed only 2 students (17%) understood the distinction between *bargaining* (price-focused) and *negotiation* (value-added and collaborative). Business email writing skills were also weak, with 8 students (67%) producing informal or non-standard texts lacking phrases like "please find attached" or "we look forward to your response." Classroom observations noted low

student engagement in conventional business communication simulations, likely due to limited exposure to authentic materials and digital literacy constraints.

The action research intervention implemented a digital-based ESP module over 4 weeks (September-October 2025), including Zoom-based negotiation simulations for maritime contracts and tour packages and interactive AI chatbot exercises to differentiate *bargaining* from *negotiation*. Zoom simulations replicated real-world scenarios, such as negotiating shipping service prices or tour packages with international tourists, emphasizing collaborative phrases. The AI chatbot provided automated feedback on writing and speaking tasks, helping students grasp the difference between *bargaining* (e.g., “lower the price”) and *negotiation* (e.g., “offer a package with added value”). Post-test results showed significant improvement: 11 students (92%) correctly distinguished *bargaining* and *negotiation*, 9 students (75%) improved in using negotiation phrases like “reach a mutual agreement,” and 10 students (83%) produced more formal and structured business texts.

Qualitative feedback from students highlighted the Zoom simulations as “relevant” and “reflective of real-world work scenarios,” particularly in Labuan Bajo’s tourism context. The AI chatbot was deemed “helpful” for flexible, interactive practice, though 3 students noted the need for additional guidance in using the technology. Post-intervention classroom observations indicated increased student engagement, with more active discussions during simulations.

Discussion

The needs analysis findings align with prior research affirming negotiation and business document writing as critical needs in maritime and tourism industries. The initial gap in students’ understanding of bargaining versus negotiation reflects a common challenge in Indonesian ESP instruction: the lack of authentic, industry-relevant materials. Digital interventions, such as Zoom simulations and AI chatbots, proved effective in addressing this gap, as supported by literature on digitalized ESP teaching that enhances engagement and conceptual understanding. The module’s success also demonstrates that technology can bridge students’ limited access to real-world business communication scenarios, particularly in Labuan Bajo, where English-language exposure is scarce.

From a cultural perspective, collaborative negotiation skills support Manggarai hospitality values, as emphasized in traditions like the *Ritual Kepok*. This study reinforces the argument that ESP instruction should integrate local cultural elements to ensure sensitive and effective communication with international tourists. The research’s limitations, such as the small sample size (12 students) and the absence of alumni from the English program, were mitigated through data triangulation with stakeholders and alumni from other programs, ensuring qualitative validity. These findings are relevant to 2025 trends in Indonesian vocational education, where digitalization and industry-aligned curricula are priorities for enhancing graduate employability.

Table 1. Changes in Student Understanding in the English Terms for Business and Professional Course

No	Aspect	Initial Observation	Post-Intervention
1	Understanding Bargaining vs. Negotiation	2/12 students	11/12 students
2	Negotiation Speaking Skills	3/12 students	9/12 students

3	Business Writing Skills	4/12 students	10/12 students
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Source: Data processing, 2025

CONCLUSION

This study addresses three key questions regarding English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction in the English Terms for Business and Professional course at the Applied Bachelor's Program in English for Business and Professional Communication, Politeknik eLBajo Commodus, focusing on English language needs for business communication in Labuan Bajo's maritime and tourism industries.

First, needs analysis identified negotiation and business document writing (e.g., formal emails and proposals) as top priorities, with 80% of stakeholders emphasizing collaborative negotiation and 60% highlighting business writing for maritime (e.g., shipping contracts) and tourism (e.g., tour packages) contexts.

Second, the development of digital-based ESP teaching strategies through action research, incorporating Zoom negotiation simulations and AI chatbot exercises, proved effective in addressing students' difficulties in distinguishing bargaining (competitive, win-lose) from negotiation (collaborative, win-win).

Third, impact evaluation demonstrated significant improvements: 92% of students (11 out of 12) understood the distinction, 75% enhanced their negotiation speaking skills, and 83% improved in business document writing post-intervention. These findings confirm an initial gap in students' business communication understanding, which digital-based, industry-relevant teaching approaches can bridge.

The practical implications are highly relevant for vocational education at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus, particularly in the English Terms for Business and Professional course. The developed digital ESP module can be integrated into the curriculum to enhance students' employability in Labuan Bajo's maritime and tourism sectors while supporting local cultural values like Manggarai hospitality in professional communication.

This approach aligns vocational education with Industry 4.0 demands, where digital and cross-cultural communication skills are essential. Limitations, such as the small sample size (12 students) and lack of English program alumni, were addressed through triangulation with stakeholder and alumni data from other programs, ensuring finding validity. The study offers potential for further development, such as expanding the digital module across the vocational curriculum or exploring immersive technologies like virtual reality for more realistic simulations.

Recommendations for future research include testing the ESP module on a larger scale, involving more students from various programs at Politeknik eLBajo Commodus to assess generalizability. Further studies could explore digital training for ESP lecturers to enhance industry-aligned teaching capacities. Additionally, future research could deepen the integration of local cultural elements, such as Manggarai traditions, into ESP materials to strengthen cross-cultural sensitivity in business communication. Thus, this study not only contributes to developing relevant vocational curricula in Labuan Bajo but also provides a foundation for educational innovations supporting local economic growth through competent, globally competitive human resources.

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