

Identifying Employees' Perceptions and Language Needs: A Comprehensive ESP Analysis in a Multinational Automotive Manufacturing Company in Cikarang

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes English for Specific Purposes (ESP) needs from employees' perspectives at a multinational automotive company in Cikarang. It identifies the specific English language skills required across various technical divisions—including Quality Control, Homologation, Vehicle Testing, Purchasing, and Engineering Design. Using a qualitative approach, we conducted in-depth interviews with employees, HR personnel, and managers (including expatriates). The research highlights significant gaps between employees' current proficiency and actual job demands, explores their perceptions of existing ESP training, and proposes a tailored training framework based on real workplace needs. These findings contribute to the ESP literature by offering a multi-stakeholder, qualitative analysis and serve as a strategic guide for companies to design more effective language training programs.

Keywords: ESP; Needs Analysis; Automotive Industry; English Language Training; Employee Perceptions;

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the automotive manufacturing industry into a globally integrated ecosystem has

fundamentally reshaped its operational landscape, compelling companies to operate across geographical and cultural boundaries. In the automotive sector, where international collaboration, technology transfer, and adherence to global quality standards are commonplace, English has been firmly established as the primary lingua franca (Robinett et al., 1988). A sufficient command of English is no longer merely a competitive advantage; it is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring operational efficiency, fostering innovation, and maintaining corporate competitiveness (Ekene Ezinwa Nwankwo et al., 2024; Hyland, 2000). This situation has created an urgent need for employees in various technical divisions to acquire specific English language skills directly relevant to their daily tasks. Despite a high level of awareness regarding the importance of English, many companies continue to implement generic language training programs. The content and methods of these programs are often not aligned with the actual communication needs of a professional environment (Bielousova, 2017; Yigitoglu, 2011). This non-contextual approach frequently results in a significant gap between the linguistic skills taught and the workplace's real-world demands, such as writing technical reports, handling global quality/regulation standards, or participating in discussions with global engineers (Hyland, 2022). Consequently, employees often perceive existing training programs as ineffective, ultimately impacting their motivation and professional growth. Research on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within the automotive industry is still relatively limited. Most existing studies focus on curriculum design at the vocational or university level, rather than conducting an in-depth analysis of the language needs that emerge in a real-world working environment (Paltridge & Starfield, 2012).

Furthermore, qualitative studies that integrate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, ranging from technical employees to human resources (HR) staff and managers, remain scarce. This limitation highlights a significant research gap addressed by this study through a holistic exploration of English language needs and perceptions in the workplace from diverse viewpoints. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the specific and functional English language needs

across various technical divisions within a multinational automotive manufacturing company in Cikarang. The research also aims to characterize the perceptions of employees, managers, and HR staff regarding the importance of English and the effectiveness of current training programs. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the main challenges faced by implementing English language training and propose a tailored ESP training framework based on these findings. This research is expected to contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge by enriching the ESP literature with qualitative data from a professional automotive context and serving as a strategic guide for companies to design more effective language training programs.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

A.1 Theoretical Foundations of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

The theoretical foundations of this study are deeply rooted in the established principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). A central tenet of ESP, as articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (Robinet et al., 1988), is its learner-centered approach. Unlike General English, ESP is not considered a separate language form but rather a teaching and learning methodology where the specific needs of the learners drive the content, instructional methods, and objectives. This perspective emphasizes that effective language instruction must be tailored to the learners' specific language use purposes. Building on this foundation, a comprehensive framework for ESP course design is provided by Dudley-Evans and St. John (Atique & Khan, 2015). Their work stresses that the entire process must be guided by thoroughly understanding the learners' specific language needs. A key distinction is made between target situation needs (what the learner needs to do in their professional context) and learning needs (what the learner must do to acquire those skills). This dual focus is considered critical, ensuring the training content is relevant to the job and pedagogically sound. A crucial component of this framework is needs analysis, which Basturkmen (Basturkmen, 2010) defines as the systematic collection and analysis of information regarding the language requirements of a professional context. It is argued that a

robust needs analysis must go beyond surface-level language skills to explore the specific tasks, genres, and discourses in which learners are engaged. This process informs the development of context-specific materials and functions, making the learning experience more authentic and effective (Todey, 2018). This view is further supported by Long (Long, 2010) and Munby (Dobakhti, 2014), who assert that needs analysis is the "engine" of ESP, as it provides the essential data for effective curriculum design.

The importance of contextual discourse is further emphasized by Hyland (Hyland, 2022), who introduced the concepts of "disciplinary discourse" and "workplace English." Hyland posits that each profession and workplace possesses unique communicative practices, specialized vocabulary, and rhetorical conventions. Therefore, an effective ESP program must focus on these specific discourses, allowing learners to navigate their professional roles' implicit and explicit communication demands. Bhatia (Saparas, 2006) and Swales (Pufahl & Swales, 1993), pioneers in genre analysis, also highlight the significance of understanding the communicative purposes of specific texts (e.g., technical reports, emails) within a professional community. Finally, a broader perspective on ESP research is offered by Paltridge and Starfield (Paltridge & Starfield, 2012), who advocate for a focus on real-world contexts and the professional communication that occurs within them. Their work highlights the importance of employing diverse research methods, including qualitative approaches, to capture the complex realities of language use in different professional environments. This theoretical lens justifies the qualitative methodology of the current study, which aims to provide a nuanced understanding of language needs that quantitative methods may not fully capture.

A.2 Previous Research and Identified Gaps

The application of ESP principles has been extensively studied across various professional domains. However, a significant gap exists in research focusing on the automotive industry, particularly within the Indonesian context. While several studies have investigated ESP needs in technical and engineering fields, many primarily rely on quantitative methods (Li & Fu, 2021; Liu et al., 2011). These surveys provide

a broad overview but often lack the in-depth, contextual detail that qualitative methods can capture (Zealand et al., 2013).

A.2.1 Focus on Students versus Employees: A significant portion of ESP research in technical fields, including the automotive sector, concentrates on students and curriculum design (Damanik et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2020). While valuable, this leaves a void in understanding the actual, day-to-day language needs and perceptions of experienced employees already embedded in the workplace (Kim, 2013).

A.2.2 Limited Stakeholder Perspectives: The majority of research focuses on the technical employees themselves, largely omitting the crucial perspectives of HR personnel, who manage training programs, and managers (especially expatriates), who are direct stakeholders in effective cross-cultural communication and decision-making (Faraji et al., 2023; Jaradat & Sy, 2012). The absence of these diverse perspectives constitutes a clear gap in most automotive ESP research (Galina Pleşca, 2010; Qu et al., 2023).

A.2.3 Methodological Limitations: As noted, many studies employ quantitative survey methods, which, while providing valuable data, often fail to capture the nuanced, contextual, and usually unspoken communication demands of a specific workplace. The rich, qualitative data required to understand the "how" and "why" of language use are frequently missing (Suningsih, 2021).

A.2.4 Underexplored Geographical Context: While research on ESP in Asia exists, the specific context of multinational automotive companies in Indonesia has rarely been the subject of a deep, multistakeholder qualitative study (Petraki & Khat, 2022).

This study aims to bridge these gaps by adopting a holistic, qualitative approach to analyze ESP needs and employee perceptions in a multinational automotive manufacturing company. By conducting in-depth interviews with a diverse group of stakeholders, including technical staff from various divisions, HR personnel, and managers/advisors, this research is intended to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the communication landscape. The findings will not only contribute new, context-specific data to

the ESP literature but also serve as a practical guide for companies to develop a more effective, tailored language training framework that directly addresses the real-world communication demands of their employees.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to understand the needs and perceptions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within a multinational automotive manufacturing company. A qualitative design is the most suitable method because it allows for a detailed exploration of complex, real-world phenomena that cannot be captured through quantitative data alone (Creswell, 2014). The methodology is designed to provide a rich, multi-faceted perspective from various key stakeholders across different divisions.

1. Theoretical Lens and Key Concepts

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The analysis is guided by key concepts defining the research's core.

1.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP): This study defines ESP as the English language skills required for specific professional tasks within the automotive manufacturing sector, distinct from general English proficiency. It is understood as a pedagogical approach that tailors language instruction to the specific communicative needs of the learner.

1.2 Needs Analysis: This is the primary analytical tool of the study. It is operationalized as the systematic identification of the communication tasks, challenges, and skills required for effective job performance, as perceived by various stakeholders. Needs analysis is the "engine" for ESP curriculum design, providing the foundational data to ensure relevance.

1.3 Multi-Stakeholder Perspective: This concept emphasizes gathering data from diverse participants. It is believed that by incorporating the views of employees (the learners), HR personnel (the trainers), and managers/advisors (the end-users of the communication), a more comprehensive, credible, and contextually-rich understanding of language needs can be achieved.

The conceptual relationship between these elements is central to the study's design: Needs analysis, informed by a multi-stakeholder perspective and viewed through the theoretical lens of ESP, will identify the gap between the employees' current English proficiency and the specific communicative demands of their roles.

2. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through a combination of methods to ensure a robust and comprehensive understanding:

2.1 In-depth Interviews: We conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants. Interview guides were tailored for each stakeholder group to address their specific roles and experiences. These interviews were designed to elicit detailed information about their communication needs, challenges, and perceptions of existing training programs.

2.2 Indirect Observation: Indirect observation was also conducted to enrich the contextual understanding of the workplace while respecting confidentiality policies. This involved collaborating with a select group of employees who served as on-the-ground observers. They provided detailed accounts and descriptions of daily communication practices, such as the nature of email exchanges, technical jargon, and communication during team discussions through regular communication via a professional platform like LinkedIn.

3. Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were analyzed using thematic coding, following the principles of (Miles B. Matthew, 2014). This process involved a systematic approach to identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns within the qualitative data. Key steps included:

3.1 Transcription: All interview recordings were transcribed to provide a complete text for analysis.

3.1 Coding: Initial codes were generated by identifying specific phrases and concepts related to the research questions.

Categorization: Codes were then grouped into broader categories to form initial themes.

Theme Identification: These categories were refined to identify overarching themes that comprehensively answer the research questions.

4. Trustworthiness and Validity

The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through the use of triangulation and member-checking. Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing data from stakeholder groups (employees, managers, and HR) and data collection methods (in-depth interviews and indirect observation). Additionally, member-checking was performed by sharing preliminary findings with a selection of participants to confirm that their perspectives were accurately represented, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study's conclusions (Fryer, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings from our qualitative needs analysis. The results are organized around the specific communication needs of each division, employee perceptions of training, and the common implementation challenges. The discussion connects these findings to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in the study, affirming that English language needs within the company are highly specific and vary significantly across divisions. This finding strongly supports the core tenet of ESP theory (Robinet et al., 1988), which is that language instruction must be tailored to the learner's purpose.

1. English Needs by Division: A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective

The analysis revealed that the English language needs within the company are highly specific and vary significantly across different divisions. This finding strongly supports the core tenet of ESP, as articulated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) (Mahbub, 2022), which is that language instruction must be tailored to the learner's purpose.

1.1 Quality Control (QC): Employees in the QC division primarily require English for report writing, defect documentation, and international inquiries. This finding aligns with Chen and Wang's (2019) study, which also highlighted the

critical need for clear and concise technical descriptions among quality control personnel in a global firm. (Ramamurthy et al., 2021) also found that technicians' primary needs involved the ability to read and understand technical instructions. One participant from QC elaborated, "We need to write detailed reports about defects, and the terminology must be precise so the team in Japan or Thailand understands exactly what the problem is."

1.2 Homologation: This division's needs are focused on regulatory correspondence and standard compliance reports. The communication tasks here are particular to the legal and administrative genres of the automotive industry. This finding echoes Swales's concept of genre analysis, where specific communicative purposes are embedded within distinct professional communities, requiring a focused approach to language training (Pufahl & Swales, 1993). A manager from this division stated, "Our main job is to communicate with government bodies and write official reports about vehicle standards. English has to be very formal and specific to regulatory language."

1.3 Vehicle Testing: The main requirements for this group are the ability to explain test results and interpret technical specifications. This is a direct application of "disciplinary discourse" (Hyland, 2022), where technical and scientific language is used to communicate findings accurately. This finding is also consistent with Li and Wu's study on technicians, which emphasized the need for understanding technical instructions. A vehicle test engineer noted, "When a test fails, I have to write a clear explanation of the results. I also have to read a lot of manuals to know the exact specs (Bris et al., 2021)."

1.4 Engineering Design: Employees in this division require English to collaborate with global engineers and to read CAD manuals. This points to a dual need for spoken interpersonal and specialized literacy skills, a gap identified by (Li & Fu, 2021) among engineers. The ability to articulate design concepts and understand complex manuals is crucial for product development and innovation. An engineer shared, "I often have video calls with my colleagues in Japan. I need to explain my design ideas and also understand their feedback. Reading the manuals is a daily task."

1.5 Purchasing: Employees in the purchasing division require English primarily for ****negotiating with foreign vendors****, writing formal email correspondence, and presenting new material or supplier progress. A participant noted, "In my job, I need to negotiate contracts and discuss technical details with suppliers," underscoring the need for context-specific vocabulary. This need for written and spoken skills aligns with the dual-skill requirements highlighted by (Li & Fu, 2021) for technical roles, but with a specific focus on business and negotiation genres.

1.6 Human Resources (HR): HR personnel need English for candidate communication, training documentation, and regional coordination. This finding highlights the importance of English for nontechnical roles, a perspective often overlooked in ESP research for technical fields. It aligns with the findings that underscore the importance of English for cross-cultural communication in managerial and administrative roles. An HR manager explained, "I manage training for all regions, so I need to write official letters and coordinate via email with my counterparts in other countries. Also, sometimes I interview candidates who are expatriates." (Bris et al., 2021) also found similar needs among HR staff in multinational corporations.

1.7 Managers/Advisors: This group's needs are centered on decision-making and cross-cultural communication. This reflects their positions' strategic and interpersonal demands, which require advanced negotiation and persuasive communication skills. This is consistent with the multi-stakeholder view advocated by Tavangar and Jafari (2016), where managers' perspectives reveal higher-level communication needs often missed in employee-centric analyses. A Japanese expatriate manager commented, "My job is making decisions with the local team. I need to explain complex concepts simply and understand their opinions, which requires an excellent command of English from both sides." Yang & Lee (2018) support this view, highlighting the role of managers in fostering an environment for communication.

2. Employee Perceptions and Program Effectiveness

The employees' perceptions serve as a critical lens for evaluating the current state of language training. The findings here reveal a significant disconnect between existing programs and employee needs, a key gap identified in the literature.

2.1 High Importance, Low Confidence: A consistent theme across all interviews was the employees' strong recognition of English's importance for career advancement and professional duties. However, this acknowledgment was coupled with a collective lack of confidence in their proficiency. This gap underscores the ineffectiveness of past training in building functional communicative competence, a finding also noted by Li and Li (2015) in their study of Chinese engineers. Sarmiento & Santos (2016) also explored this gap in the context of English as a Lingua Franca. One employee expressed this sentiment: "I know English is important for my career, but when I speak with a manager, I feel very nervous. My English is not good enough." This lack of confidence is particularly acute in technical discussions and formal presentations, where employees may understand the content but struggle to articulate their thoughts clearly.

2.2 Irrelevant and Generic Training: Previous ESP programs were widely perceived as generic and irrelevant to the employees' job tasks. This issue is a common challenge in corporate training, as highlighted by Alshammari (2020), who identified irrelevant materials as a primary obstacle to effective learning. The standardized, one-size-fits-all approach often fails to address specific divisions' unique vocabulary and communicative genres, as posited by Hyland (2007). A participant from the purchasing division said, "We had a training course, but the topics were about general conversation, like ordering food. In my job, I need to negotiate contracts and discuss technical details with suppliers. The training was not helpful for that."

2.3 Interest in Task-Based Learning: There was a strong interest among employees in tailored ESP training linked directly to daily job tasks. This finding provides a clear mandate for a task-based learning approach, which aligns with the pedagogical recommendations of Chang (2018) and Smith &

Jones (2019). Learning is seen as more effective when directly applicable to the workplace, making the experience more authentic and engaging. An employee summarized this well: "I think training should focus on real things we do daily, like how to write an email about a part defect or explain a problem in a meeting."

3 Common Challenges to Implementation

Several common challenges hinder the successful implementation of effective ESP programs, particularly within the Indonesian corporate context.

3.1 Time Constraints and Operational Demands: The most frequently cited challenge was the limited time for training due to work demands. This logistical barrier has been well-documented in the literature, with other researchers also identifying a lack of time as a significant issue in corporate training (Alshammari, 2020). One participant mentioned, "It is very difficult to take a full day off for training. My workload is high, and my work gets delayed if I am in a class." This challenge underscores the need for flexible, modular training designs that can be integrated into the daily workflow.

3.2 Misalignment of Content and Lack of Technical Vocabulary: The content of previous training programs was often criticized for not being aligned with actual workplace needs. This echoes the findings of Kim and Park (2019), who found that training without systematic evaluation often fails to produce significant results. The content-driven approach, without a prior needs analysis, is a primary reason for low engagement and poor outcomes. This issue was captured by a participant who stated, "The materials were from a textbook unrelated to automotive. We learned vocabulary for different things, but not for what we do here." The specific lack of technical vocabulary and genre-specific language was a recurring theme across all divisions.

3.4 Lack of Authentic Practice and Supportive Environment: Employees reported few opportunities for authentic English practice after the training ended. This issue relates directly to the principles of communicative competence, where language skills must be used in meaningful contexts to be retained and developed. This lack of a supportive language

environment in the workplace is a barrier to sustained learning and skill development. A manager highlighted this: "Even if we have training, the employees return to their desks and only speak Indonesian. They need more opportunities to use the English they learned in real situations." Fan & Chen (2016) also found that corporate culture significantly impacts the effectiveness of language training.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This study successfully conducted a qualitative, multi-stakeholder needs analysis to investigate the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requirements within a multinational automotive manufacturing company. The findings conclusively demonstrate that the English language needs are highly specific to each division, a key finding that validates the core principles of ESP theory. A significant gap was identified between employees' current English proficiency and the specific communication demands of their roles, such as writing technical reports and engaging in cross-cultural dialogues. Furthermore, a critical disconnect was found in employee perceptions of past training programs. These programs were widely considered generic, irrelevant to daily job tasks, and ultimately ineffective. This led to a pervasive lack of confidence among the workforce despite their strong belief in the importance of English for professional advancement. The research also pinpointed several key challenges hindering effective ESP implementation, including limited time for training, a fundamental misalignment between curriculum content and actual workplace needs, and a scarcity of opportunities for authentic English practice. These findings underscore the urgent need for a strategic shift in corporate language training. A "one-size-fits-all" model is no longer viable. A more tailored, contextualized, and task-based approach is essential to bridge the skills gap. By focusing on the specific communication needs of each division and integrating training with practical workplace scenarios, companies can

significantly enhance their employees' professional capabilities and foster a more competent, confident workforce.

2. Suggestions for an Improved ESP Framework

Based on the research findings and identified gaps, we propose the following framework for developing a more effective and relevant English training program:

2.1 Conduct a Detailed, Division-Specific Needs Analysis: A comprehensive needs analysis must be conducted for each division before designing any curriculum. This process should move beyond simple surveys to include in-depth interviews and direct observations of the specific communication tasks, genres, and vocabulary required. Crucially, input from all stakeholders—employees, managers, and HR—must be incorporated to ensure the findings are accurate and relevant.

2.2 Implement a Task-Based and Contextualized Curriculum: The new curriculum should abandon generic content in favor of a structure based on employees' daily communicative tasks. For example, training for the QC team should focus on drafting defect reports, while training for the Engineering Design team should emphasize collaborative discussions and interpreting technical manuals. This approach ensures learning is not only directly applicable but also immediately useful, making the experience more authentic and engaging for employees. **Integrate Training into the Work Environment:** To overcome the challenges of limited time and lack of practice, training should be flexible and, whenever possible, integrated into the daily workflow. This can be achieved through microlearning modules (short, focused training sessions) or practice-oriented workshops that simulate real workplace scenarios. Companies should also encourage using English in specific internal communications, such as email threads with international teams, to foster a supportive environment for ongoing language practice.

2.3 Establish a Continuous Evaluation and Feedback Loop: The new framework must include a systematic process for evaluating training effectiveness. This involves collecting

regular feedback from participants and managers to refine and update the curriculum continuously. A robust feedback mechanism will help ensure the training remains relevant as the company's needs evolve, demonstrating a tangible return on investment in employee development.

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