

ENGLISH FOR BUSINESS

Teaching English for Business in the Digital Age: Preparing Students for Communication or Merely Completing the Syllabus?

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Opinion and Ideas

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The teaching of English in higher education is often positioned as a compulsory academic requirement. Students attend the course, complete assignments, sit for examinations, and receive grades. However, one important question remains: does English instruction truly prepare students to communicate in real professional situations, or does it merely help them pass another subject in the curriculum?

This question becomes increasingly relevant in the context of economics and business students. Today, business communication no longer takes place only in formal meetings, printed letters, or face-to-face transactions. It has moved into digital platforms: email, online marketplaces, social media, business chats, digital proposals, product captions, and virtual presentations. In this situation, English is not only a linguistic subject. It has become a practical tool for participation in digital economic life.

My dissertation research, entitled *Developing Instructional Materials for English for Business Communication Based on Digital Literacy*, departs from this concern. The study focuses on how English for Business Communication materials can be designed to help students, particularly those with basic English proficiency, engage with authentic business communication tasks in digital contexts. The issue is not simply whether students know English grammar, but whether they can use English meaningfully, ethically, and confidently in digital business situations.



FROM GENERAL ENGLISH TO CONTEXTUAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION



For many years, English courses in non-English departments have often relied on general materials. The topics may be useful, but they are not always connected to students' disciplinary needs. Economics students, for example, do not only need to describe hobbies, daily routines, or classroom objects. They need to introduce products, write business emails, explain simple services, negotiate politely, promote local products, and respond to customers in appropriate language.

This is where the perspective of English for Specific Purposes becomes important. ESP reminds us that language teaching should be based on learners' needs, target situations, and disciplinary contexts. In the case of economics students, English instruction should be connected to business communication practices. The classroom should become a bridge between linguistic knowledge and future professional performance.

However, business communication today cannot be separated from digital literacy. Students may be able to translate a sentence but still struggle to write a clear email. They may know vocabulary but feel unsure about composing product captions for social media. They may use digital platforms every day, but not always understand how to communicate professionally, politely, and strategically through them.

Therefore, English for Business Communication should not be treated as a conventional language course with business vocabulary added to it. It needs to be redesigned as a learning experience where language, business context, and digital literacy are integrated.



Digital literacy is sometimes misunderstood as the ability to operate devices or access the internet. In language education, however, digital literacy should be understood more broadly. It includes the ability to find information, evaluate sources, produce digital texts, communicate appropriately across platforms, and understand the ethical dimensions of online interaction.

For business communication, this competence is crucial. A short message to a customer, an email to a partner, or a product description on a digital platform may influence trust, professionalism, and business identity. Students need to understand that communication in digital spaces requires accuracy, clarity, politeness, audience awareness, and cultural sensitivity.

This is especially important for students in local higher education contexts. Many students have rich local experiences, entrepreneurial potential, and familiarity with digital media, but they may not yet have the confidence to present themselves in English. The challenge is not only linguistic; it is also psychological and pedagogical. Students need materials that are close to their world but open the door to wider professional participation.

Digital Literacy as Communicative Readiness

In this sense, digital literacy-based EBC materials can help students move from passive learning to active communication. They do not simply learn about English; they practice using English for meaningful purposes.

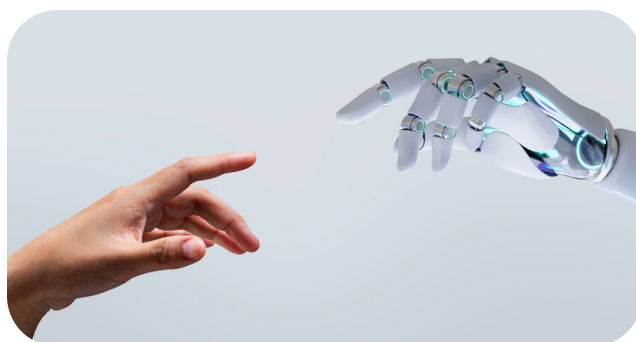
Designing Materials through the ADDIE Model

The development of instructional materials in my research follows the ADDIE model: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. This model is useful because it prevents material development from becoming a purely intuitive activity. Each stage requires evidence, reflection, and revision.

The analysis stage identifies students' needs, lecturers' perspectives, institutional context, and the digital communication demands relevant to business English. The design stage translates these needs into learning objectives, unit structures, tasks, and assessment forms. The development stage produces learning materials, including digital and interactive components. The implementation stage tests how the materials work in real classroom situations. Finally, the evaluation stage examines their practicality, acceptability, and effectiveness.

Through this process, instructional materials are not merely compiled; they are constructed systematically. The aim is to ensure that every unit, task, and assessment item has a clear pedagogical function.

The materials developed in this study include topics such as business self-introduction, digital product promotion, email writing, customer communication, online business presentation, and reflective digital tasks. These topics are designed to connect English learning with students' future roles as graduates who may work in business, entrepreneurship, administration, community development, or digital economic sectors.



The implementation of the developed materials indicates that students benefit from contextual and digitally oriented English tasks. In the pilot implementation, students showed improvement in several areas, including vocabulary use, email coherence, and business language use. The most visible improvement appeared in their ability to use business-related expressions more appropriately in digital communication contexts.

This finding suggests that students learn better when English is not presented as an abstract subject, but as a tool for solving communicative problems. When students are asked to write a business email, create a product caption, or simulate customer interaction, they begin to see the practical value of English. The learning process becomes more concrete and purposeful.

Nevertheless, the implementation also shows that material development alone is not enough. Lecturers need pedagogical readiness. Institutions need digital infrastructure. Students need guidance, feedback, and repeated practice. Without these supporting elements, even well-designed materials may not reach their full potential.

Challenges in Indonesian Higher Education.

The integration of digital literacy into EBC instruction faces several challenges.

WHAT THE IMPLEMENTATION SHOWS?

Closing Reflection

The future of English language education in Indonesia should not be limited to producing students who know English as a subject. It should aim to prepare students who can use English responsibly, creatively, and confidently in real social, academic, and professional contexts.

For economics and business students, English is no longer an additional skill. It is part of communicative capital in the digital economy. Therefore, English for Business Communication needs to be reimagined: from textbook-based instruction to context-based performance, from grammar completion to digital communication, and from passive learning to professional participation.

The central issue is not whether students should learn English. The more urgent question is whether the English they learn is relevant enough to help them enter the world they are preparing for.

If English teaching can answer that question, then language education will not merely complete the syllabus. It will prepare students to participate meaningfully in the future.



First, students' English proficiency is often varied. Some students may understand basic expressions, while others still struggle with sentence construction. Materials must therefore be adaptive, scaffolded, and accessible.

Second, digital familiarity does not automatically mean digital literacy. Students may use social media intensively, but still need guidance in producing professional, ethical, and audience-sensitive communication.

Third, lecturers may need support in designing digital tasks, using learning platforms, and assessing multimodal student work. Teaching EBC in the digital age requires more than explaining vocabulary and grammar. It requires the ability to facilitate performance-based learning.

Fourth, institutional support is essential. Learning management systems, internet access, digital modules, and assessment tools should be aligned with the learning objectives. Digital transformation in language education cannot depend only on individual lecturer creativity.

Strategic Recommendations

Based on these reflections, several steps are worth considering.

First, English courses for non-English departments should be redesigned through systematic needs analysis. The question should not be "What English materials are available?" but "What communicative tasks do students need in their academic and professional future?"

Second, EBC materials should integrate digital literacy explicitly. Students should be trained to write emails, respond to customers, prepare digital business profiles, communicate through professional platforms, and evaluate digital content.

Third, assessment should move beyond conventional written tests. Performance-based assessment, project-based tasks, portfolios, and digital products are more suitable for measuring students' communicative readiness.

Fourth, local contexts should be used as learning resources. Students can be encouraged to promote local products, describe community-based businesses, or develop simple digital campaigns rooted in their own environment. This approach makes English learning more meaningful and culturally grounded.

Fifth, professional associations such as APSPBI can play an important role in encouraging collaboration among English education programs. Material development, lecturer training, digital pedagogy workshops, and research dissemination can strengthen the quality of English instruction across institutions.