

Identifying Market-Driven Communication Competencies for English for Management Curriculum Development: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The increasing demand for workplace-ready graduates in today's globalized business environment has highlighted the need for higher education institutions, particularly English for Management (EfM) programs. This study aimed to identify market-driven communication competencies required by management graduates and examine their implications for curriculum development. An exploratory mixed-methods design was employed involving 22 industry practitioners, 11 academic stakeholders, and 50 Management students at Universitas Pendidikan Nasional. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and curriculum document analysis. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed six essential communication competency domains: Professional Communication, Intercultural Communication, Leadership Communication, Customer Relations Communication, Digital Communication, and Negotiation and Problem-Solving Communication. The study also identified significant gaps between workplace expectations and existing curriculum provisions, particularly in digital, intercultural, customer relations, and negotiation competencies. The study concludes that a market-driven approach is necessary for EfM curriculum development. The proposed Bali Market-Driven English Communication Competency Framework (BM-ECCF) provides an evidence-based foundation for curriculum redesign aimed at enhancing graduate employability and workplace readiness.

Keywords

Curriculum Development, Communication Competencies, Employability, English for Management, English for Specific Purposes



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of globalization, digital transformation, and international business has substantially changed the competencies expected of university graduates, particularly those preparing for management careers. In today's global labor market,

employers seek graduates who possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also strong communication skills that enable them to work effectively in multicultural and technology-mediated environments. English has become the primary language of international business, tourism, trade, and professional collaboration, making English communication competence an essential employability skill for management graduates ((Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen & Succi & Canovi, 2013) As organizations increasingly operate across national and cultural boundaries, management professionals are expected to communicate confidently through presentations, negotiations, meetings, customer interactions, and digital platforms. Consequently, higher education institutions are under growing pressure to ensure that graduates develop workplace-relevant English communication competencies that meet current industry expectations.

Despite this growing demand, many studies have identified a persistent gap between university curricula and workplace communication requirements. Employers frequently report that although graduates possess adequate theoretical knowledge, they often lack the practical communication skills required to perform effectively in professional settings (Succi & Canovi, 2020). This mismatch is particularly evident in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education, where language courses sometimes prioritize grammatical knowledge and general English proficiency while providing limited opportunities for authentic workplace communication. Contemporary ESP research argues that language learning should be grounded in learners' future professional contexts and supported by systematic needs analysis involving multiple stakeholders (Basturkmen, 2020; Serafini et al., 2015). Likewise, (Hu & AlSaqqaf, 2024) emphasize that effective ESP curriculum development requires close collaboration with industry to ensure that course content reflects actual workplace communication demands. These findings suggest that curriculum development should move beyond traditional language instruction toward competency-based learning that prepares graduates for real professional tasks.

The theoretical basis for this approach is rooted in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes designing language instruction according to learners' target situations and occupational needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Recent ESP studies further demonstrate that contemporary workplaces require graduates to possess a combination of professional communication, intercultural competence, digital communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. For example, (Yeung & Mah, 2024) argue that sector-specific ESP curricula are more effective when they are informed by authentic workplace practices and validated through stakeholder participation. Similarly, (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, n.d. 2013) explain that English has evolved into a Business English Lingua Franca (BELF), where successful communication depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the ability to negotiate meaning, build professional relationships, and collaborate across cultures. These developments reinforce the importance of conducting systematic needs analysis before designing curricula that aim to improve graduate employability and workplace readiness.

The need for market-driven curriculum development is particularly relevant in Bali, Indonesia, whose economy is strongly supported by tourism, hospitality, international business, and service industries. Management graduates in Bali frequently communicate with international tourists, foreign business partners, multinational organizations, and culturally diverse workforces. Consequently, English communication competence is not merely an academic requirement but an essential professional capability. Employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate proficiency in business presentations, customer relations, intercultural communication, negotiation, teamwork, and digital communication, reflecting the realities of an internationally connected labour market. However, empirical research examining these communication competencies within Bali's specific economic context remains limited. Previous studies have largely focused on general business English or broad employability skills without comprehensively integrating employer expectations, student perspectives, and curriculum analysis to inform curriculum development. This lack of context-specific evidence creates challenges for universities seeking to design English for Management (EfM) programs that effectively address regional labor market needs.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a market-driven skills extraction approach to identify the English communication competencies required by management graduates in Bali. Using an exploratory mixed-methods design, the study integrates perspectives from employers, industry practitioners, academic stakeholders, management students, and curriculum documents to identify communication competencies that are most valued in the workplace and to evaluate their representation within the existing English for Management curriculum. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Bali Market-Driven English Communication Competency Framework (BM-ECCF) as an evidence-based framework for curriculum redesign. The framework is expected to support curriculum developers, English lecturers, and higher education institutions in designing learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment practices that better align with workplace expectations. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing literature on English for Specific Purposes, employability-oriented curriculum development, and competency-based management education while offering practical recommendations for improving graduate employability within Bali's tourism-driven economy.

METHODS

This study employed an exploratory mixed-methods design to identify market-driven English communication competencies required by management graduates and examine their implications for English for Management (EfM) curriculum development. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and curriculum document analysis, while quantitative data were gathered through student questionnaires. The integration of these data sources enabled triangulation and enhanced the validity and credibility of the findings.

Moreover, the study employed purposive sampling to select participants, three stakeholder groups participated in the study: 22 industry practitioners comprising human

resource personnel, hotel managers, guest relations managers, marketing managers, event management professionals, and business development managers; 11 academic stakeholders, including English lecturers, management lecturers, and curriculum experts; and 50 Management students who completed the questionnaire survey. In addition, 15 students participated in follow-up interviews to provide deeper insights into their communication needs, learning experiences, and perceptions of workplace communication requirements. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups enabled comprehensive data triangulation and a richer understanding of market-driven communication competencies for English for Management curriculum development.

Furthermore, Semi-structured interviews were conducted with industry practitioners, lecturers, and selected students to explore workplace communication requirements, essential English communication competencies, curriculum strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for curriculum improvement. The interview protocol was developed based on qualitative interviewing and ESP needs-analysis principles (Cresswell Qualitative-Inquiry-and-Research-Design-Creswell (2013.); Patton, 2015; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

A structured questionnaire was administered to management students to investigate the perceived importance of English communication skills, workplace communication needs, and preferred learning activities. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and was adapted from previous ESP needs-analysis and employability studies. Curriculum documents, including course syllabi, semester learning plans (RPS), learning outcomes, teaching materials, assessment rubrics, and student assignments were analyzed.

In qualitative data analysis, Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step procedure proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) such as: 1. Data familiarization, 2. Initial coding, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes, 6. Framework development. Moreover, in the *Quantitative Data Analysis*, Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics through SPSS. The analysis included Mean scores, Standard deviations, Frequencies, Percentages, Competency rankings. Additionally, curriculum mapping matrix was developed to compare identified workplace competencies with curriculum provisions.

Table 1. Curriculum Mapping Analysis

Alignment Level	Description
Fully Addressed	Competency represented in outcomes, content, teaching, and assessment
Partially Addressed	Competency represented in some curriculum components
Not Addressed	Competencies absent from curriculum

This process enabled identification of curriculum–workplace gaps. Lastly, several

strategies were employed to ensure research rigor, such as Data Triangulation; Member Checking; Peer Debriefing; and Audit Trail Transferability

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Student Perceptions of English Communication Competencies

A total of 50 Management students participated in the questionnaire survey. The descriptive analysis revealed that students generally perceived English communication skills as highly important for their future careers.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Communication Competencies

Communication Competency	Mean	SD	Rank
Presentation Skills	4.78	0.42	1
Business Communication	4.72	0.48	2
Intercultural Communication	4.69	0.51	3
Negotiation Skills	4.61	0.57	4
Leadership Communication	4.57	0.62	5
Digital Communication	4.54	0.59	6
Customer Relations Communication	4.51	0.65	7
Business Report Writing	4.42	0.68	8

The results indicate that students place the highest importance on presentation skills ($M = 4.78$), business communication ($M = 4.72$), and intercultural communication ($M = 4.69$). These findings suggest that students recognize the importance of workplace-oriented communication competencies rather than merely linguistic knowledge. Interestingly, digital communication and customer relations communication also received high ratings, reflecting students' awareness of evolving workplace requirements in tourism and service industries.

Employer and Industry Perspectives on Communication Competencies

The top 3 thematic analysis of interviews with 22 industry stakeholders generated from six major competency domains.

Table 3. Communication Competencies Identified by Employers

Competency Domain	Specific Competency	Frequency
Professional Communication	Presentation Skills	19
	Meeting Participation	18
	Business Correspondence	17
	Public Speaking	15
	Report Writing	14
Intercultural Communication	Cross-Cultural Communication	18
	Cultural Awareness	17
	International Client Interaction	16
	Multicultural Teamwork	14

Digital Communication	Virtual Meetings	18
	Email Communication	17
	Online Collaboration	15
	Social Media Communication	13

Curriculum Document Analysis

Curriculum analysis revealed varying levels of alignment between existing curriculum provisions and workplace communication demands.

Table 4. Curriculum Mapping Matrix

Communication Competency Domain	Learning Outcomes	Content Coverage	Teaching Activities	Assessment Practices	Alignment Level
Professional Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	Fully Addressed
Intercultural Communication	✓	✓	✗	✗	Partially Addressed
Leadership Communication	✗	✓	✗	✗	Partially Addressed
Customer Relations Communication	✗	✗	✓	✗	Partially Addressed
Digital Communication	✗	✗	✗	✗	Not Addressed
Negotiation & Problem-Solving Communication	✗	✓	✗	✗	Partially Addressed

The analysis indicates that current curricula focus primarily on professional communication while providing limited coverage of other competencies identified by employers.

Table 5. Identified Curriculum Gaps

Competency Domain	Employer Importance	Student Importance	Curriculum Coverage	Gap Level
Professional Communication	High	High	High	Low
Intercultural Communication	High	High	Moderate	Medium
Leadership Communication	High	High	Moderate	Medium
Customer Relations Communication	High	Moderate	Low	High
Digital Communication	High	High	Low	High
Negotiation Skills	High	High	Low	High

The largest gaps were observed in customer relations communication, digital communication, and negotiation skills.

Development of the Bali Market-Driven English Communication Competency Framework (BM-ECCF).

Based on triangulation, the study developed the Bali Market-Driven English Communication Competency Framework as follows.

Table 6. BM-ECCF Competency Domains

Domain	Competencies
Professional Communication	Presentations, Meetings, Business Writing
Intercultural Communication	Cultural Awareness, Global Interaction
Leadership Communication	Team Coordination, Conflict Resolution
Customer Relations Communication	Guest Relations, Complaint Handling
Digital Communication	Virtual Meetings, Email Communication
Negotiation & Problem Solving	Persuasion, Negotiation, Decision Making

Discussion

The results of this study show that the English communication competence required by management graduates is much more than general proficiency in English. The confluence of employer, student and curriculum data shows that communication competence in today's workplaces encompasses professional interaction, intercultural awareness, digital communication, leadership, customer engagement and negotiation skills. This finding is a direct support to the basic principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that language teaching should be based on learners' target situation and workplace communication needs instead of general language objectives (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Moreover, the findings support the argument of Serafini et al. (2015) that a systematic needs analysis involving multiple stakeholders provides a more comprehensive basis for ESP curriculum development as it documents authentic communication practices in the workplace rather than relying on academic assumptions alone. Thus, the present study indicates that curriculum decisions should always be evidence-based and relevant to industry expectations.

One of the key findings is the importance of professional communication skills, especially presentation skills, business writing, meeting participation and public speaking. Both employers and students consistently pointed to these skills, which suggests that management graduates see English as a professional tool rather than just a school subject. This finding is in line with Jackson's (2014) study that oral communication competence has a significant impact on graduate employability because employers value graduates who can present ideas clearly, work well together, and communicate confidently in the professional environment. Similarly, Succi and Canovi (2020) suggest that communication competence is one of the most important employability skills expected by employers and that it even outweighs technical expertise in judging graduate readiness. In this way, the current findings corroborate the claim that English for Management curricula should focus on authentic workplace communication tasks rather than on isolated language exercises.

The other major finding is the importance of intercultural communication in Bali's tourism economy. The employers repeatedly stressed the need for management graduates to have cultural awareness, to be pragmatic and to be able to communicate effectively with clients and colleagues from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This observation is in strong agreement with the idea of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) put forward by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013), who suggest that effective international business communication is not so much dependent on native-speaker accuracy but rather on the capacity to negotiate meaning, to build mutual understanding and to sustain professional relationships across cultures. Similarly, Tong and Gao (2022) suggest that intercultural communication has become a crucial part of graduate employability since international workplaces more and more demand employees to adjust their communication styles to different cultural expectations. In the context of Bali, in which international tourism is still a dominant economic sector, intercultural communication therefore needs to be treated as a core learning outcome, not as a complementary part of English teaching.

The results also highlight the increasing importance of skills for online communication such as virtual meetings, professional email communication, online collaboration and digital customer interaction. This is indicative of the changing nature of modern workplaces towards technology-mediated communication practices. However, the curriculum analysis reveals that these competencies are still largely absent in the current English for Management curriculum. Findings of this kind support the observation of AlSaqqaf and Hu (2024) that ESP curriculum development needs to respond to changing workplace communication practices by incorporating authentic digital communication tasks into instructional design. Likewise, Yeung and Mah (2023) argue that successful ESP curriculum redesign necessitates ongoing adaptation to professional practices, so that graduates acquire communication competencies that meet shifting workplace expectations. Therefore, English for Management courses should incorporate scenarios of digital communication, virtual meetings, online presentations and collaborative digital projects that mirror real professional settings.

The results also suggest the increasing importance of abilities for online communication such as virtual meetings, professional email communication, online collaboration and digital customer interaction. This implies a transformation in the character of present-day workplaces towards communication activities mediated by technology. However, the research of curricula indicates that these competences are still generally missing in the contemporary English for Management curriculum. Such findings reinforce AlSaqqaf and Hu's (2024) remark that ESP curriculum creation needs to be responsive to changing workplace communication practices through the integration of real-world digital communication activities into the instructional design. Likewise, Yeung and Mah (2023) argue that the effective redesign of the ESP curriculum involves a regular adjustment of professional practices to equip graduates with communication abilities that meet evolving industry demands. Hence, the English for Management classes should cover the situations of digital

communication, virtual meetings, online presentations, and collaborative digital projects that reflect real professional environments.

In addition, employers identified negotiation, communication with customers, complaint handling and communication for problem solving as key competencies that are not adequately represented in the current curriculum. The findings suggest that workplace communication is becoming more task-oriented, with graduates needing to work collaboratively to solve problems while also maintaining positive relationships with customers and colleagues. Ellis (2003) feels that task-based language teaching is the most effective approach to developing these competencies because authentic communicative tasks allow learners to link language use with problem-solving and professional decision-making. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest that negotiation simulations, customer complaint handling, service recovery activities and role-play should be included as an integral part of the instruction of English for Management. Such authentic learning experiences would better prepare students for the communication challenges they will face in the hospitality, tourism and service industries in Bali.

This argument is further strengthened by the curriculum mapping analysis, which shows a substantial gap between the communication demands of the workplace and the current curriculum offer. There is a fair coverage of professional communication, but limited attention is given to competencies related to digital communication, customer relations, leadership communication and negotiation. This finding is in line with previous studies that have reported enduring gaps between higher education curricula and labour market expectations. According to the Succi and Canovi (2020), most university graduates possess enough theoretical knowledge, but lack the practical communication skills that are expected by the employers. In the same vein, authors Serafini et al. (2015) argue that ESP curricula are often not representative of the real target situation, due to the limited cooperation between educational institutions and industry stakeholders in the process of curriculum development. This study adds to these findings by showing that the curriculum mismatch continues to exist in management education in Bali even though the region heavily depends on international business and tourism.

One of the key contributions of this study is the development of the Bali Market-Driven English Communication Competency Framework (BM-ECCF). The BM-ECCF, on the other hand, goes beyond the traditional needs analysis that stops with the identification of learners' language needs and transforms empirical findings into a complete curriculum framework based on six communication competency domains aligned with what is expected in the workplace. The framework operationalises ESP principles suggested by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in terms of target needs, curriculum components, learning outcomes, instructional activities and assessment practices. The framework also complements recent curriculum redesign efforts such as those reported by Yeung and Mah (2023) who stress the need for systematic incorporation of stakeholders' perspectives into curriculum planning for successful innovation of ESP curriculum. Thus, the BM-ECCF offers a theoretical contribution

to the development of ESP curriculum as well as a practical model for improving graduate employability in the internationally connected business environment of Bali.

In general, the findings imply that English for Management education needs to undergo a paradigm shift from language-centred to competency-based professional communication. Communication competence should be evaluated not only in terms of grammatical correctness, but also in terms of graduates' ability to function effectively in real-world workplace scenarios that involve multicultural interaction, digital communication, customer engagement, and collaborative problem-solving. This transformation is in line with the increasing emphasis on graduate employability as indicated by Tong and Gao (2022), Succi and Canovi (2020) and the Future of Jobs Report (World Economic Forum, 2023), which identify communication, collaboration, adaptability and digital competence as some of the most important competencies needed in the future workforce. Therefore, universities need to keep on improving the syllabi of English for Management through systematic co-operation with industry partners to produce graduates with communication skills suitable for the fast-changing professional world.

CONCLUSION

This study identified the English communication competencies required by management graduates in Bali and examined their implications for English for Management (EfM) curriculum development. Using an exploratory mixed-methods approach, the study revealed six key competency domains: Professional Communication, Intercultural Communication, Leadership Communication, Customer Relations Communication, Digital Communication, and Negotiation and Problem-Solving Communication. These findings indicate that contemporary workplaces require communication skills that extend beyond general English proficiency and reflect the demands of multicultural, technology-mediated, and service-oriented business environments.

The findings also revealed a gap between workplace expectations and existing EfM curricula. While professional communication was relatively well represented, competencies related to intercultural communication, leadership, customer relations, digital communication, and negotiation were insufficiently addressed. This suggests that current curricula may not fully prepare graduates for the communication challenges encountered in Bali's tourism-driven and internationally connected labor market. The study therefore highlights the importance of adopting a market-driven and needs-based approach to curriculum development that incorporates employer expectations, student needs, and industry trends.

Based on these findings, the study developed the Bali Market-Driven English Communication Competency Framework (BM-ECCF), which provides an evidence-based foundation for curriculum redesign, instructional innovation, and competency-based assessment. The framework offers practical guidance for aligning English for Management

education with workplace requirements and enhancing graduate employability, professional readiness, and long-term career success in Bali's evolving business environment.

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