

Enhancing business english skills: Addressing speaking challenges in the management department

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Abstract

This study explores the speaking challenges faced by management students in Business English courses at a university in Indonesia and proposes targeted strategies for improvement. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups to identify key issues, including high levels of anxiety, limited business-specific vocabulary, and difficulties in articulating complex ideas. The findings indicate that interactive learning methods, such as role-plays, simulations, and one-on-one coaching, are effective in reducing anxiety and enhancing speaking proficiency. These strategies offer practical, contextualized opportunities for students to develop their communication skills in a supportive environment. The study recommends integrating these approaches into Business English curricula to better align educational practices with the professional needs of management students, ultimately preparing them for successful communication in global business contexts. Future research should further explore the integration of digital tools and broader applications across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Business English, speaking challenges, management students, interactive learning, language anxiety.

1. Introduction

Effective communication in Business English is a crucial skill for management students preparing for roles in global business contexts. English, as the primary language of international business, necessitates proficiency in speaking and understanding business-specific terminology. This competency is critical for success in multinational corporations, global markets, and diverse work environments where English is often the common language of communication (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

However, many students in non-native English-speaking countries, such as Indonesia, face significant challenges in mastering these skills. Studies indicate that language anxiety, particularly speaking anxiety, is one of the most common barriers to effective

communication in Business English. This anxiety often stems from a fear of making mistakes, which can significantly hinder students' willingness to engage in speaking activities and discussions (Horwitz, 2022; Wilson, 2023). Anxiety can be exacerbated by a lack of confidence and the absence of real-world speaking opportunities in educational settings, which are essential for developing practical language skills (Ahmed, 2020).

Another prominent challenge is the limited use of business-specific vocabulary and expressions, which can impede students' ability to articulate complex ideas fluently in professional contexts. For many students, the language used in academic settings does not fully align with the terminology and communication styles required in business environments (Kumar & Lee,

2021). This gap between academic preparation and professional expectations often leads to difficulties when students transition from the classroom to the workplace (Jones et al., 2021; Davis & Patterson, 2022).

Research emphasizes the need for contextualized learning environments where students can practice Business English in realistic scenarios. Techniques such as role-plays, simulations, and case studies have been shown to reduce anxiety and improve fluency by allowing students to engage in language use within a supportive, low-stakes environment (Brown et al., 2022; Smith, 2021). These methods enable students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, fostering the confidence needed to communicate effectively in business settings.

Furthermore, personalized learning approaches, such as one-on-one coaching, are highlighted as effective strategies for addressing specific speaking challenges. Individualized feedback and targeted practice help students overcome particular difficulties, such as pronunciation issues or the use of complex syntax, which may not be adequately addressed in larger classroom settings (Nguyen & Clark, 2023). Digital tools, including language learning apps and online platforms, also provide valuable supplementary resources for students to practice independently, offering flexibility and additional exposure to Business English outside the classroom (Patel & Zhang, 2023; Lee, 2023).

Despite these advancements, there remains a lack of targeted interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by management students in non-native English-speaking countries, particularly in Indonesia. Existing curricula often fail to fully integrate business-specific

content and practical communication skills, leaving students unprepared for the language demands of professional environments (Rahman et al., 2022). This study aims to address this gap by conducting a needs analysis to identify the specific speaking challenges faced by management students at a university in Indonesia and propose evidence-based strategies for enhancing their Business English proficiency.

The findings from this study will inform the development of targeted interventions that incorporate interactive and personalized learning approaches, such as role-plays, simulations, and individualized coaching. By aligning educational practices with the needs of management students, this research seeks to provide actionable insights that can improve students' confidence and effectiveness in professional communication. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on Business English education by offering practical recommendations for curriculum development that address the specific language needs of management students in Indonesia.

2. Method

Research Design: This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative focus group discussions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the speaking challenges faced by management students in Business English courses. This design was chosen to capture both the breadth of challenges through surveys and the depth of individual experiences via focus groups. The mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings (Carter & Green, 2023).

Participants: The study involved 120 management students from a major

university in Indonesia. Participants were selected based on their enrollment in Business English courses and a self-reported need for improvement in speaking skills. The majority of participants were at the beginner level (60%), with 40% at the intermediate level, and none at the advanced level (Thompson & White, 2022). This distribution reflects the typical language proficiency among students in similar educational settings in Indonesia, where English is often taught as a foreign language with limited opportunities for practical application (Murray & Hill, 2023).

Sampling Method: Participants were recruited through convenience sampling from the management department's Business English courses. This sampling method was chosen due to the accessibility of participants and the focus on specific courses where the language challenges are most relevant. While convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the results, it is suitable for exploratory studies aiming to identify and understand specific challenges within a defined group (Smith, 2021).

Data Collection:

1. **Quantitative Surveys:** A structured questionnaire consisting of 18 questions was administered to collect data on students' perceived speaking challenges, confidence levels, and preferred strategies for improvement. The survey included a mix of Likert scale questions, multiple-choice items, and open-ended responses to allow for a comprehensive analysis of the issues faced by the participants (Rahman et al., 2022). The survey was conducted online, making it accessible and

convenient for students to complete during their own time.

2. **Qualitative Focus Groups:**

Three focus group sessions, each comprising 8-10 students, were conducted to explore the specific challenges and contextual factors affecting students' experiences in learning Business English. Focus group discussions provided an opportunity for students to express their views in a supportive environment, allowing for a deeper exploration of their language learning experiences and needs (Nguyen & Clark, 2023). The sessions were moderated by experienced facilitators who guided the discussions using a semi-structured format to ensure consistency while allowing for spontaneous insights.

Data Analysis:

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the frequency and severity of reported speaking challenges. Statistical software was employed to generate means, frequencies, and standard deviations for each survey item. This quantitative analysis provided a clear overview of the common challenges faced by students and their preferences for learning strategies (Kumar & Lee, 2021).
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis was applied to the focus group transcripts to identify key themes related to anxiety, vocabulary limitations, and effective learning methods. The analysis followed a six-phase process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes,

searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed for a detailed examination of the qualitative data, capturing the nuances of students' experiences and providing contextual insights to complement the quantitative findings.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants were provided with information about the study's aims and procedures, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. To ensure confidentiality, all data were anonymized, and participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Limitations: While the mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive view of the speaking challenges faced by management students, there are limitations to consider. The use of convenience sampling may affect the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population of management students in Indonesia. Additionally, self-reported data from surveys may be subject to bias, as students may underreport or overreport their challenges based on their perceptions or expectations (Roberts, 2022).

3. Results

Quantitative Findings: The survey results revealed that 70% of participants reported high levels of anxiety when speaking English, primarily due to a fear of making mistakes in front of peers.

This anxiety was found to significantly impact their willingness to participate in class discussions and presentations, corroborating findings from existing literature on language anxiety (Horwitz, 2022; Wilson, 2023). Additionally, 55% of students identified limited business-specific vocabulary as a major barrier, hindering their ability to effectively communicate in professional contexts (Jones et al., 2021). This challenge was particularly pronounced among students at the beginner level, who often struggled to articulate complex ideas clearly.

Furthermore, 65% of students reported difficulties in expressing complex thoughts during presentations and group activities, which negatively affected their performance in these tasks. The survey also highlighted a preference for interactive learning methods, with 60% of students favoring role-plays and simulations as effective strategies for improving their speaking skills. This preference aligns with the findings of Brown et al. (2022), who noted the benefits of practical, contextual learning approaches in reducing anxiety and enhancing fluency.

Qualitative Findings: The focus group discussions provided deeper insights into the specific speaking challenges faced by students. A recurring theme was the pervasive fear of judgment from peers, which significantly affected students' confidence and willingness to speak. Many participants expressed a preference for smaller, supportive groups where they felt more comfortable practicing speaking without the fear of embarrassment. This suggests a need for more personalized and less intimidating speaking opportunities within the curriculum (Nguyen & Clark, 2023).

Students also emphasized the lack of relevance in existing course materials, noting that much of the content was too

general and did not adequately prepare them for the specific language demands of business environments. This disconnect between classroom learning and real-world application was highlighted as a key area for improvement. Participants suggested that incorporating more business-specific scenarios and vocabulary practice into the curriculum would better align educational content with their professional aspirations (Rahman et al., 2022).

Correlations and Patterns: Statistical analysis indicated a positive correlation between the frequency of participation in role-plays and increased confidence levels in speaking. Students who regularly engaged in these activities reported a significant improvement in their ability to articulate thoughts clearly and use business-specific terminology effectively. This finding supports the effectiveness of role-plays and simulations in reducing language anxiety and enhancing practical communication skills, as noted by Kumar & Lee (2021). Additionally, students who participated in one-on-one coaching sessions showed marked progress in overcoming specific speaking challenges, such as pronunciation difficulties and fluency issues. This suggests that personalized feedback and targeted practice are crucial components of effective Business English instruction, providing tailored support that addresses individual learner needs (Nguyen & Clark, 2023).

Unexpected Findings: An unexpected finding was the low usage of digital tools among participants, despite the availability of numerous language learning apps designed to support Business English proficiency. Only 40% of students reported using such tools regularly, with many citing a lack of time or motivation as barriers to their use. This highlights a potential area for

further exploration, as digital tools could offer flexible, accessible opportunities for additional practice outside the classroom (Patel & Zhang, 2023).

4. Discussion

Interpretation of Findings: The findings of this study underscore significant challenges in developing Business English speaking skills among management students in Indonesia. High levels of anxiety, particularly related to fear of making mistakes, were prevalent and served as a major barrier to effective communication. This aligns with the broader literature, which identifies language anxiety as a common issue among language learners, affecting their performance and willingness to engage in speaking tasks (Horwitz, 2022; Wilson, 2023).

The limited use of business-specific vocabulary further complicated students' ability to participate fully in professional discussions and presentations. This gap between classroom language instruction and real-world business needs highlights a critical area for curriculum development. Incorporating more business-focused content and practice opportunities into the curriculum can help bridge this gap, enabling students to apply their language skills in relevant contexts (Kumar & Lee, 2021; Davis & Patterson, 2022).

Implications for Curriculum Development: The preference for role-plays, simulations, and one-on-one coaching as preferred learning strategies suggests that management students benefit from interactive and personalized approaches to language learning. Role-plays and simulations provide a safe space for students to practice speaking without the high stakes of real-world repercussions, thereby reducing anxiety and building confidence. These methods also allow for the practical application of

business-specific vocabulary and communication strategies, which are essential for success in professional settings (Brown et al., 2022; Smith, 2021).

One-on-one coaching, which was favored for its personalized feedback, addresses individual learner needs by focusing on specific speaking challenges such as pronunciation and fluency. This tailored approach helps students overcome particular obstacles that may not be adequately addressed in group settings, highlighting the value of individualized instruction in Business English education (Nguyen & Clark, 2023).

Comparison with Existing Literature:

The results of this study are consistent with existing research on effective strategies for Business English instruction. Similar studies have found that interactive and contextual learning methods, such as role-plays and simulations, are highly effective in reducing language anxiety and improving speaking proficiency (Kim & Park, 2023). Additionally, the positive impact of personalized feedback from one-on-one coaching aligns with findings that emphasize the importance of addressing individual differences in language learning (Nguyen & Clark, 2023).

However, this study also identified a lower-than-expected use of digital learning tools, despite their potential to provide additional practice opportunities outside of traditional classroom settings. This suggests that while digital tools can be valuable, their integration into students' learning routines may require more structured support and encouragement from educators (Patel & Zhang, 2023). Further research could explore how to effectively incorporate digital resources into Business English

curricula to enhance their utilization and impact.

Limitations and Future Research:

While this study provides valuable insights into the speaking challenges of management students, it is limited by its focus on a single university, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand to include multiple institutions across different regions to validate the results and explore the diversity of challenges and preferences among a broader student population (Smith, 2021; Zhao & Yu, 2023).

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from surveys and focus groups may introduce biases related to participants' perceptions and willingness to disclose their challenges. Employing more objective measures, such as performance assessments and longitudinal studies, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of different instructional strategies over time (Roberts, 2022).

Practical Applications: The study's findings have practical implications for the design and delivery of Business English curricula in management education. Educators and curriculum developers should consider integrating more interactive and personalized learning opportunities, such as role-plays, simulations, and one-on-one coaching, to address the specific speaking challenges faced by students. Additionally, incorporating business-specific content and vocabulary practice into these activities can help align language instruction with the professional needs of management students (Davis & Patterson, 2022).

To further support students' language development, educators should explore ways to better integrate digital tools into the learning process, providing

structured opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback in flexible, self-directed formats. By combining these approaches, educational programs can create a more supportive and effective learning environment that empowers students to overcome their speaking challenges and achieve proficiency in Business English.

Conclusion

Summary: This study identified key speaking challenges among management students in Indonesia, including high levels of anxiety, limited business-specific vocabulary, and difficulties articulating complex ideas. The findings highlight the importance of interactive and personalized learning approaches, such as role-plays, simulations, and one-on-one coaching, in enhancing Business English proficiency. These methods provide practical, contextualized opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills, reduce anxiety, and build confidence.

Recommendations: To address the identified challenges, educational programs should prioritize the integration of experiential learning activities that align with the language needs of management students. Role-plays and simulations should be incorporated into the curriculum to provide students with realistic practice opportunities, while one-on-one coaching can offer personalized support for addressing individual speaking challenges. Additionally, curriculum developers should consider expanding the use of digital tools and resources to supplement classroom instruction and provide flexible, accessible options for practice outside of class.

Future Directions: Further research should explore the effectiveness of these interventions across different educational contexts and examine their long-term impact on students'

professional readiness and career outcomes. Expanding the scope of research to include a wider range of digital learning tools could also provide additional insights into optimizing Business English instruction for management students. By continuing to refine and adapt Business English curricula, educators can better prepare students for the communication demands of the business world, ultimately contributing to their success in global professional environments.

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