



English Language Skills Required by International Relations Officers: A Target Situation Analysis and Its Implications for English for International Relations Officers Course Design

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ABSTRACT

To develop an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for learners who would like to work as international relations officers (IROs), a Target Situation Analysis (TSA) is obligatory for course developers to arrive at a conclusion regarding the English language skills that learners have to master in order to work in this professional context successfully. The present study, therefore, aims to investigate which English language skills are required for working as an IRO. Overall, 400 Thai IROs were purposively selected to participate in the study. The data collection procedures were divided into the collection of quantitative data through a questionnaire and qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that listening and reading skills were most required by IROs in various working contexts. These two receptive skills are generally utilized because IROs need to gather information to build knowledge for communicating with their foreign counterparts. However, speaking and writing skills are still widely applied by IROs, as they also need to deliver key messages precisely and appropriately. The results of this study offer ESP course developers valuable insights into the English skills that should be emphasized in ESP courses for IROs.

Keywords: needs analysis, target situation analysis, ESP course design, skill-centered course design, English for International Relations Officers

Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has gradually been established itself as one of the most significant and prominent disciplines of English Language Teaching (ELT) since the 1960s. This is due to the fact that most English language learners, especially those studying in higher education, would like to learn communicative English skills specifically used in a particular occupation or discipline. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further emphasize the importance of ESP courses in learners' achievement by stating that ESP primarily highlights the purpose of studying English to achieve specific language skills required for a target situation. ESP also considers the specific needs of learners to design effective teaching and learning activities and select appropriate course content (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This means that a needs analysis (NA) is regarded as an essential stage prior to implementing an ESP course in order to ensure that the employment of certain language aspects, teaching methods, and class activities will be perfectly designed to meet the specific needs of the learners and be aligned with the requirements of their profession. Many ESP scholars (e.g., Basturkmen, 2010; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2006; Ibrahim, 2020; Jordan, 2010) confirm that the results from performing a NA are crucial in promoting the effectiveness of the curricula, syllabi, materials, and assessments of ESP courses, and as such NA should be applied as one of the practical guidelines for effective ESP course development.

As mentioned earlier, since NA is required for developing and designing an ESP course, a number of studies related to ESP needs analysis have been conducted in several contexts, especially in higher education or university-level courses (Akyel & Ozek, 2010; Aliakbari & Boghayeri, 2014; Bielousova, 2017; Chostelidou, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; Poorhadi, 2017; Saputro & Hima, 2018). However, despite the significance of NA, its absence in the development of some ESP courses has been observed in some educational contexts, especially with new ESP courses that have never been taught in any institutions. As a result, teachers and course developers who would like to develop a new ESP course might experience some difficulties and challenges in finding useful information and practical guidelines from previous ESP needs analysis studies when developing such a new ESP course. Additionally, in some previous studies, NA might not be perfectly generalized and applicable to other ESP courses administered in different learning contexts where there are different groups of learners with specific learning goals and needs. This means that teachers and course developers of new ESP courses inevitably have to conduct their own NA to ensure that the newly developed ESP course will be regarded as an effective ESP course for enhancing learners' language skills in accordance with their target goals and needs.

In this regard, to the best of our knowledge, English for International Relations Officers represents a new ESP course and a Target Situation Analysis (TSA) to analyze English language skills required by IROs to perform their duties and job-related activities has never been conducted in any previous studies, especially in Thai educational contexts. Therefore, TSA for this ESP course is considered obligatory for the teachers and course developers to shed light on specific English language skills that should be mainly taught to learners who would like to work as international relations officers. In this respect, this study specifically aims to

- (1) Investigate English language skills required by IROs to perform their duties and job-related activities; and
- (2) Determine the English language skills which need to be included in an English for International Relations Officers course.

The study findings might be of great significance to English language teaching, particularly in ESP, by providing an applicable reference as a guideline for helping ESP teachers and course developers plan the course syllabus and design appropriate teaching materials to prepare learners in the early stages of their future careers in international relations and diplomatic affairs.

Dominance of English as a Working Language in International Relations

Due to the dominance of French in international relations and diplomacy from the 17th century to the 20th century, English was partially neglected as a language for international communication. The rise of English in international relations and diplomacy actually began in 1919 in the aftermath of World War I, when the Treaty of Versailles was written in English and French (Crystal, 2003). English is, however, considered to have gradually replaced French as the *lingua franca* of international relations and diplomacy since World War II (Kirkpatrick et al., 2019).

The widespread use of English in diplomacy and foreign affairs was further advanced by the prominent international roles played by the powerful English-speaking nations (i.e., the United States and the Commonwealth of Nations) (Dossan, 2020), particularly in the establishment of international organizations and major international political gatherings in all parts of the world (Crystal, 2003). The League of Nations is regarded as the first of many modern international alliances allocating a significant role to English as its working language to ensure mutual understanding among members during its meetings. English is further recognized as one of the six official languages of the United Nations (UN), along with the five other UN working languages: French, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish (Walkinshaw et al., 2019). English was also selected as a working language for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which is also a worldwide organization. The need to facilitate the cooperation of NATO member states helped propel the use of English as a *lingua franca* because most international laws and decrees are written in English, and most international talks and debates are conducted in English. In addition to many global organizations, many dominant regional organizations also use English as the working language (Crystal, 2003). The European Union (EU) and its executive branch, the European Commission (EC), which is the most important European organization that aims to facilitate cooperation among member states, also established English as an official language of the organization to make cooperation more efficient. Additionally, English has been chosen as the official language of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). This means the use of English as a medium of communication is a phenomenon that is not restricted only to native English-speaking countries but has also spread to the rest of the world, even when English is not the native language.

The modern trend toward using English as a working language outside native English-speaking countries has many sources and contexts, such as business, science, technology, and aviation (Dossan, 2020). Apart from being used in these contexts, as mentioned earlier, English is also considered the official working language of international relations, focusing mainly on its role in enhancing mutual understanding among professionals engaged in international relations and diplomacy. In the context of international relations and diplomacy, the representatives and delegates of international organizations need to use English to deliver messages and share opinions during meetings like international assemblies, summits, and conferences for the sake of ensuring mutual understanding among participants with different native languages. To serve this function and for practicality, English has been chosen as the *de jure* and *de facto* *lingua franca* of international relations and diplomacy.

Needs Analysis as a Prerequisite for Designing an ESP Course

As the needs of learners are regarded as one of the most crucial factors to be accounted for in developing a practical ESP course, many scholars (e.g., Basturkmen, 2010; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2006; Ibrahim, 2020; Jordan, 2010) regard NA as a prerequisite for designing an ESP course (i.e., writing syllabus, selecting material, designing teaching and learning activity, and choosing evaluation method). NA in ESP is focused on gathering information about learners' needs and defining target situations and the best environment for studying on an ESP course

(Otilia, 2015). This means NA is significant for ESP teachers and course developers in identifying learners' needs and determining the specific language skills that learners need to develop (Alsamadani, 2017). In other words, the purpose of NA is to set the course objectives and content as well as to suggest how the course should be taught to meet learners' needs (Vaghari & Shuib, 2013).

According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), NA in ESP provides many benefits to ESP teachers and course developers because NA helps them determine

- professional information related to the tasks and activities that learners may have to conduct in English;
- personal information, including factors such as previous experience, cultural information, reasons for taking the course, and expectations, all of which might affect the learners' learning;
- language information, which refers to learners' current skills and language proficiency;
- language gaps in relation to learners' professional information needs;
- language learning information about what the learners have to learn;
- how the language and skills are applied in the target situations identified in the professional information; and
- information about the environment where the course is taking place.

Long (2005) further supports the significance of NA in ESP by stating the four main reasons, which are (i) to determine the relevance of the material to the learners' situations, (ii) to justify the material in terms of relevance for all parties concerned (e.g., teachers, learners, administrators, and parents), (iii) to account for different needs and styles of learners, and (iv) to create a syllabus, which will meet the needs of the learners as fully as possible within the context of the situation. Based on the aforementioned benefits, the results of NA can help ESP teachers and course developers obtain relevant information for establishing ESP courses' objectives, selecting appropriate ESP materials, and designing teaching methods to motivate learners (Otilia, 2015). In conclusion, performing NA is essential for ESP course development so that ESP teachers and course developers can gather information regarding learners' abilities, attitudes, and preferences as well as their desired abilities, changes, and expected outcomes from the ESP course.

Practical Approaches to Needs Analysis in ESP

NA might be believed to be an extensive and time-consuming process involving the analysis and interpretation of a large amount of data; however, NA is required as an initial stage of designing ESP courses (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Robinson (1991) states that NA should engage the three main types of analysis which are Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Target Situation Analysis (TSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA). In this regard, PSA aims to realize the learners' current English proficiency level, language problems, attitudes toward language learning, and learning experiences (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). However, learners' language requirements concerning the target situation are recognized through TSA. TSA is illustrated by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in terms of necessities (i.e., what learners need to learn to perform in target situations), lacks (i.e., the gaps between their current skills and the required skills), and wants (i.e., what learners desire to learn). LSA concerns learning needs related to learners' reasons for learning and efficacious learning methods (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Robinson (1991) also recommends that TSA, PSA, and LSA should be orchestrated to produce a comprehensive and precise NA.

In addition to orchestrating PSA, TSA, and LSA, triangulating data from various data collection methods to achieve a comprehensive NA with reliable and valid data has also been recommended (Cowling, 2001; Long, 2005). This means different methods should be applied to ensure the data's validity and reliability and increase the credibility of the data interpretation. Long

(2005) and Nation and Macalister (2010) recommend several data collection procedures, such as logs, interviews, observations, questionnaires, and tests. Similarly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest that surveys, questionnaires, interviews, attitude scales, job analyses, content analyses, statistical analyses, observations, and consultations with related stakeholders, such as sponsors, learners, and teachers, should be appropriately employed to obtain the data in NA. Apart from the above-recommended methods, Jordan (1997) also suggests other data collection methods for conducting NA, including diagnostic tests, learner diaries, case studies, evaluation and feedback, and a literature review of previous studies, which can provide a valuable and substantial source of information for course developers and teachers. Brown (1995) further proposes other data collection methods, including personal reviews and performance appraisals, for a triangulation method in NA.

Apart from the application of a variety of data collection methods in NA, the sources of data or respondents are another factor that should be considered to ensure the validity and reliability of NA. It is important that the sources of information and respondents must truly represent the whole population. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) state that the participants in NA should include all stakeholders. These stakeholders might be experienced teachers, current learners, alumni, personnel working in the field, clients, and employers. It is recommended that a researcher should include multiple perspectives from all stakeholders, and if the whole population cannot be invited to participate in the study, the respondents and informants should be carefully selected to ensure that they truly represent the whole population (McCawley, 2009).

For a comprehensive NA, West (1994) further recommends that NA should be conducted in at least three periods when developing a course. The first round of NA can be administered before a course begins to provide teachers with enough time to prepare the course syllabus and materials deliberately. Such NA done prior to the beginning of a course is called offline analysis. The second period when NA should be conducted is the first day of the class. This second NA provides many advantages for teachers because teachers can observe their learners and talk to them, which will subsequently provide a clearer picture of the learners' needs. The third NA is the ongoing needs analysis, providing teachers with information to identify the learners' new or short-term needs. West (1994) recommends that NA should be conducted repeatedly during the course because learners' needs can change. That is to say, NA should be performed throughout the course, not only in the pre-course stage but also during the course design period.

As mentioned earlier, NA is regarded as an integral process for ESP course development and should be deliberately and systematically conducted in order to gather substantial information regarding the learners' abilities, attitudes, and preferences, as well as their desired abilities, changes, and outcomes expected from the ESP course. Therefore, in this study, the framework of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) was adopted in the design of NA, emphasizing TSA in terms of necessities or what learners need to learn as language requirements to perform in target situations (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991). In addition, the interviews and questionnaires were also administered as a means of triangulating data.

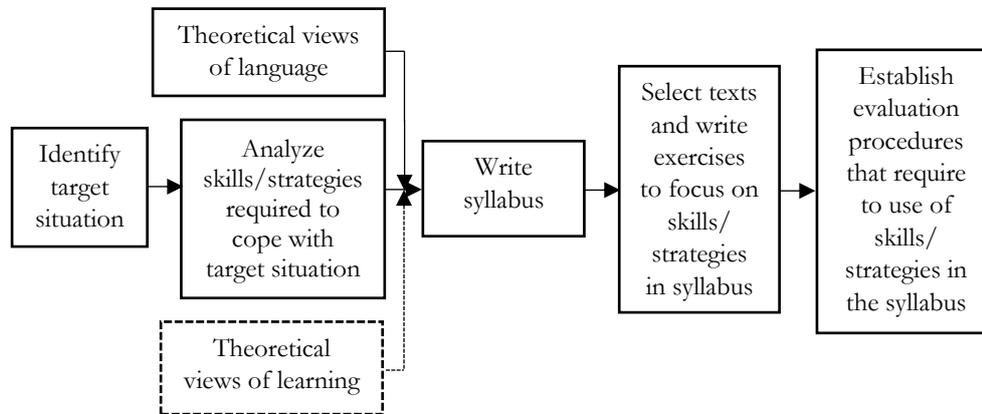
Methodology

Research Design and Conceptual Framework

The current study applied skill-centered course design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), which aims to enhance the English skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) ESP learners require for handling the target situations in which they have to be involved.

Figure 1

Skills-Centered Approach to ESP Course Design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 71)

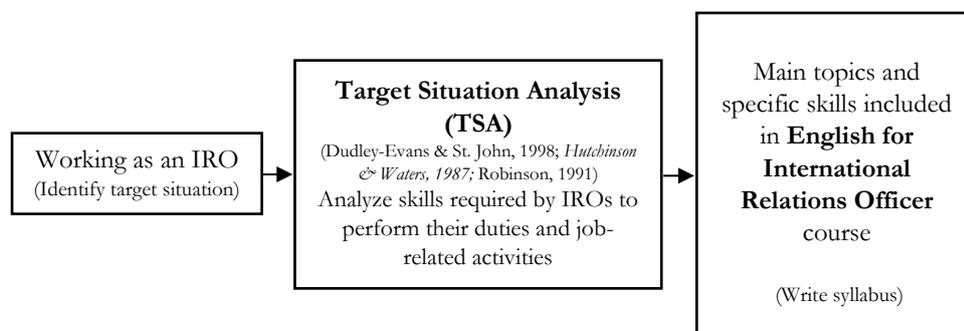


The skill-centered approach, therefore, regards the skills and strategies needed to handle a target situation as necessary information that should be identified and analyzed before writing an ESP course syllabus. The analysis of required skills and strategies can be conducted through the application of TSA. Furthermore, selecting appropriate teaching materials and exercises should also be carefully conducted according to the results of TSA. The final step of the Skill-centered Course Design is the establishment of evaluation procedures covering skills and strategies stated in the syllabus. By following the skill-centered approach, the effectiveness of an ESP course development can be achieved.

According to its objectives, the current study, however, emphasized the analysis of English language skills required by IROs through the application of TSA and the proposal of topics to be included in a course syllabus of an English for International Relations Officers course. Therefore, the last two steps of Skill-centered Course Design, which are (i) selecting materials and writing exercises and (ii) establishing evaluation procedures, were not emphasized in this study. The conceptual framework of the current study is consequently regarded as a modified Skill-centered Course Design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) with Target Situation Analysis (TSA) recommended by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), and Robinson (1991), as illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 2

Research Conceptual Framework: The Modified Skill-centered Course Design with Target Situation Analysis



Based on the conceptual framework, the target situation of the current study is working as an IRO with the successful application of English language skills to perform duties and job-related activities. Therefore, it is necessary that TSA should be conducted to analyze the English language

skills required by IROs to perform their duties and job-related activities. These identified skills enable ESP course designers to ensure that the skills and strategies that learners require for working as an IRO in the target situation are included in the course syllabus of English for International Relations Officers.

Participants

A total of 400 Thai IROs from two main sectors, governmental and intergovernmental agencies, were purposively selected to participate in the study. The participants were asked to provide their personal background information, including gender, age, education, organization type, and years of experience working as an IRO. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Item	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	100	25.00%
	Female	283	70.80%
	LGBTQ	15	03.70%
	Prefer not to say	2	00.50%
Age (years)	20–30	53	13.30%
	31–40	147	36.80%
	41–50	169	42.30%
	51–60	25	06.30%
	> 60	6	01.50%
Highest level of education	Bachelor's degree	99	24.80%
	Master's degree	274	68.50%
	Doctoral degree	27	06.80%
Organization	Governmental	200	50.00%
	Intergovernmental	200	50.00%
Experience working as an IRO (years)	3–5	79	19.80%
	6–10	107	26.80%
	11–15	100	25.00%
	16–20	49	12.20%
	> 20	65	16.20%

Research Instruments

There were two main research instruments applied in the current study to elicit qualitative and quantitative data regarding the English language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) required by international relations officers to perform their duties and job-related activities. A questionnaire was utilized to obtain quantitative data, while the qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview. The following information describes each research instrument in detail.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three parts, which were (i) participants' demographic information, (ii) perspectives of IROs toward the English skills needed to perform their duties and job-related activities, and (iii) additional suggestions. The 34 closed-ended questions in the second part of the questionnaire were deliberately developed by the researchers based on the research objectives, conceptual framework (i.e. The Modified Skill-centered Course Design (Hutchinson

& Waters, 1987) with Target Situation Analysis (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991), and the related study conducted by Saputro and Hima (2018). Based on these relevant concepts, the 34 items were purposely constructed to elicit data regarding the English language skills required to perform IROs' duties (i.e., seven statements related to the needs of listening skills, nine statements related to the needs of speaking skills, eight statements related to the needs of reading skills, and ten items related to the needs of writing skills). To respond to each of 34 statements, the participants were required to select the point on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5: "Extremely High" to 1: "Extremely Low" that mostly corresponded to their perceived needs of the skill prescribed in each statement. The content validity of the questionnaire was validated by three experts in the field of teaching ESP through the IOC (Index of Item-Objective Congruence) procedures. Additionally, the questionnaire was piloted to find its reliability and practicality before actual use, and the Cronbach's alpha was indicated as 0.82, meaning that it was appropriate for use.

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview session was employed in the present study to elicit qualitative data and further explain the questionnaire results regarding English language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) required by IROs to perform their duties and job-related activities. By participating in the interview sessions, the participants were provided with opportunities to express a broader and deeper perspective on required English skills. For practicality and feasibility, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in Thai to avoid language barriers. The same group of three experts in teaching ESP examined and validated the 10 interview questions before their actual use to ascertain content validity and reliability.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection procedures were divided into two main phases: a collection of quantitative data through a questionnaire and qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The first phase mainly involved the distribution of the questionnaire to 400 participants online via a Google Form. The quantitative data obtained from these questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). Additionally, one-way ANOVA was administered to make a comparison among the mean scores of the needs of the four English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

After collecting the questionnaire data, an appointment for the semi-structured interview was made with the 10 selected participants (consisting of five from governmental agencies and five from intergovernmental agencies) based on their convenience and willingness. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis and triangulated with the data collected from the questionnaires to allow a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the research findings.

Results and Discussion

The results regarding the perceptions of IROs toward their needs of English skills required to perform their duties and job-related activities are divided into two main parts, which are the quantitative results from the questionnaires and the qualitative results from the interviews. The results are reported and classified according to four key English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The triangulation of the questionnaire and interview results is also illustrated and discussed based on the objectives of the study accordingly.

English Language Skills Required by IROs to Perform Their Duties and Job-Related Activities

Listening Skills Required by IROs

Table 2

Required Listening Skills

Listening Skills	M	SD	Need Level	Rank
1. Listening to conversations in various contexts (e.g., telephone conversations and inquiries from foreign colleagues and visitors)	4.58	0.62	Extremely High	1
2. Listening to news reports on topics in international relations and foreign affairs	4.28	0.83	High	4
3. Listening to debates on controversial issues	3.79	1.03	High	6
4. Listening to presentations and talks in seminars, conferences, and meetings	4.32	0.92	High	2
5. Listening to discussions in seminars, conferences, and meetings	4.31	0.86	High	3
6. Listening for inference and interpretation from one language to another language	3.24	1.04	High	7
7. Listening to conversations spoken with different English accents	4.26	0.87	High	5
Overall	4.11	0.98	High	

In terms of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, all the interviewees noted that “*Listening to conversations in various contexts*” was a required listening skill because they listened to conversations in various contexts in performing their job duties, mostly with their foreign counterparts. For example, regarding visa issues, the interviewees who work in the consular section claimed that they very often needed to listen to telephone conversations in English with local people about visa inquiries as well as listen to queries during face-to-face conversations with visitors applying for a visa.

“I need to pick up telephone calls from local people asking about the visa process and listen in conversations with visitors who are applying for visa every day because it is my main duty.” (A consul)

All the interviewees also reported that “*Listening to conversations spoken with different English accents*” was required for performing their duties. Interestingly, the interviewees admitted experiencing some difficulties while listening to conversations spoken with a variety of English accents. They all claimed that sometimes it was too difficult to understand some messages while listening to their foreign colleagues with regional English accents.

“In the United Nations, there is a lot of national diversity in the office in terms of nationality. My colleagues are from different parts of the world, and sometimes I do not clearly understand what they are saying in English.” (An officer at a permanent mission)

Moreover, all the interviewees noted that “*Listening to presentations and discussions in seminars, conferences, and meetings*” was a frequent occurrence on a weekly or monthly basis. Remarkably, the interviewees claimed that English was the medium of communication in meetings because they tended to work only with international colleagues, as exemplified in the following quote.

“I always listen to presentations and discussions in English in the weekly and monthly meetings. Due to the fact that the UN consists of people from all over the world, English is the only language used in the meetings.” (A UN officer)

According to the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results, it can be concluded that listening skills are required by IROs to perform their routines based on two fundamental purposes which are listening for overall comprehension and listening to capture key messages and summarize the main ideas. In this regard, the IROs have to listen to conversations in various contexts related to their duties (e.g., telephone conversations with their foreign counterparts and inquiries from foreign colleagues and visitors). As IROs frequently have conversations with international interlocutors, they are likely to encounter and respond to inquiries from international counterparts using English as a lingua franca; therefore, they have to comprehend spoken messages with a variety of English accents to achieve successful communication. In addition, listening to capture key messages and summarize the main ideas is also required by IROs when attending conferences, seminars, and meetings that are typically held weekly or monthly. Importantly, most IROs, especially those in junior ranks, are responsible for summarizing the important information after listening to news reports related to international relations and foreign affairs, and then report these summaries to their supervisors. This is aligned with Saputro and Hima (2018), who conducted a needs analysis to investigate the actual and immediate English needs of International Relations Department (IRD) students at an Indonesia university and found that listening to English mass media was the most important skill required by IRD students in Indonesia, followed by listening to presentations.

Speaking Skills Required by IROs

Table 3

Required Speaking Skills

Speaking Skills	M	SD	Need Level	Rank
1. Addressing foreign delegates and representatives with correct hierarchical titles	3.91	0.99	High	5
2. Using proper non-verbal language while speaking	3.81	0.95	High	6
3. Taking part in discussions in meetings and debates with foreign colleagues and visitors	3.99	1.02	High	3
4. Giving interviews to the press and media on international affairs issues	2.30	1.25	Low	9
5. Giving information to foreign colleagues and visitors	3.99	1.04	High	3
6. Conducting negotiations and persuading others	3.24	1.16	Moderate	8
7. Briefing their respective supervisors about the main ideas of articles or news	3.39	1.11	Moderate	7
8. Considering the cultural differences of interlocutors while speaking	4.06	1.10	High	2
9. Considering the political sensitivities of interlocutors while speaking	4.09	1.04	High	1
Overall	3.64	1.07	High	

Table 3 reveals that the IROs ranked the statement “*Considering the political sensitivities of interlocutors while speaking*” as the speaking skill most require to perform duties and job-related activities, followed by the statement “*Considering the cultural differences of interlocutors while speaking*”. Two statements were ranked as the joint 3rd most required speaking skills, which were “*Taking part in discussions in meetings and debates with foreign colleagues and visitors*” and “*Giving information to foreign colleagues and visitor*”. The statement “*Addressing foreign delegates and representatives with correct hierarchical titles*” was ranked in 5th place, followed by “*Using proper non-verbal language while speaking*” in 6th place. Although the aforementioned statements were ranked in different orders (from 1st place to 6th place), they were all reported to have the same level of needs, which was ‘High’. The statements ranked 7th and 8th were reported to have a ‘Moderate’ level of needs. These were “*Briefing their respective*

supervisors about the main ideas of articles or news” and “*Conducting negotiations and persuading others*”, respectively. The speaking skills ranked in the lowest position with a ‘Low’ level of needs was “*Giving interviews to the press and media on international affairs issues*”. The overall needs of speaking skills (covering statements 1–9) required by the IROs to perform duties and job-related activities were at the ‘High’ level with a mean of 3.64.

Regarding the interview results, all the interviewees said they paid attention to “*Considering cultural differences and political sensitivities while speaking*”. One comment from an officer working at the United Nations was particularly fascinating; he stated that ASEAN members sometimes needed to raise their voices or increase their visibility in UN meetings. Therefore, ASEAN tried to find joint interest among group members so that all members could be represented. However, they also had to consider cultural differences among ASEAN members, as highlighted in the following quote.

“Despite the popularity and wide recognition of LGBT in Thailand and Vietnam, the LGBT issue must not be raised on behalf of ASEAN in UN meetings since there are some Muslim countries in ASEAN where being LGBT is unacceptable.” (An officer at a permanent mission)

The interviewees also mentioned “*Using proper non-verbal language while speaking*” as a prominent speaking skill. An interesting issue raised by one interviewee was that, as a consul, he met a lot of local people who were applying for visas. When he was posted in India, he could not differentiate between the gestures of nodding and shaking the head when Indian people wanted to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. He further commented on the difficulties in figuring this out during his first 6 months in India. However, he gradually adjusted himself to understand some of the body language of local people, and he eventually became familiarized with them and their body language.

“When I first arrived in India, I was very confused with the gestures of nodding and shaking the head when Indian people wanted to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ while they were speaking. It took me around 6 months to get used to the non-verbal language of Indian people.” (A consul)

“*Giving information and taking part in discussions in meetings with foreign colleagues and visitors*” is another speaking skill required for working as IROs and this skill was mentioned by all interviewees. In this case, giving information to foreign colleagues and visitors is part of officers’ daily routines. Therefore, effective communication is essential for the officers to help others comprehend their messages regardless of their strategies. Seven out of the 10 interviewees indicated that they shared information with their colleagues or visitors, especially people who were not that fluent in English. As a result, they felt that their messages could be better understood when they sent clearer messages to listeners.

“For me, broken English is acceptable, but broken messages are unacceptable. As long as your audience understands, you do not have to worry about anything else. Simply sending a clear message to listeners is the key to communication.” (A first secretary)

The interviewees also reported that “*Addressing foreign delegates and representatives with correct hierarchical titles*” was vitally important because hierarchical titles were applied for expressing diplomatic ranks in foreign affairs and international relations. Nine of the 10 interviewees claimed that it was compulsory for diplomats to attend a training session to learn diplomatic terms and etiquette. It is considered obligatory to use the correct hierarchical titles while talking with foreign delegates and representatives because it is regarded as a way to convey esteem, courtesy, or respect for their position, as indicated in the quote below.

“When I passed the MFA selection process, I attended a lot of training sessions to prepare myself to be ready for the diplomatic world. I learned new knowledge about diplomatic ranks and hierarchical titles, together with diplomatic etiquette. Training sessions primarily focus on the importance of using hierarchical titles with delegates in diplomacy.” (A counselor)

Based on the triangulation of the results obtained from questionnaires and interviews, speaking skills are required by IROs for providing information to foreign visitors and for participating in discussions and debates in international meetings. It is, therefore, necessary for IROs to appropriately and efficiently deliver messages to foreign delegates and visitors. This is in line with Saputro and Hima (2018), who indicated that talking to both native and non-native English speakers was very important for IRD students, especially in terms of speaking at seminars, meetings, and presentations. Essentially, IROs also need to be aware of cultural differences and political sensitivities while communicating with foreign interlocutors to avoid potential conflicts and achieve successful communication. In addition, the appropriate use of non-verbal languages when speaking with foreign counterparts must be considered to avoid misunderstanding resulting from cultural differences. Moreover, due to the fact that the titles of each IRO are hierarchically ranked, addressing foreign delegates with correct hierarchical titles is compulsory in diplomatic conversations.

Reading Skills Required by IROs

Table 4

Required Reading Skills

Reading Skills	M	SD	Need Level	Rank
1. Reading official announcements related to foreign affairs	4.29	1.11	High	4
2. Reading formal or official letters	4.09	1.07	High	7
3. Reading legal documents related to foreign affairs	3.75	1.12	High	8
4. Reading news related to foreign affairs containing terminology used in foreign affairs	4.44	0.89	High	1
5. Reading reports related to foreign affairs containing terminology used in foreign affairs	4.11	1.08	High	6
6. Reading articles about current and global issues containing terminology used in foreign affairs	4.17	1.00	High	5
7. Reading the meeting minutes and agendas of international conferences	4.30	0.97	High	3
8. Reading inquiry email messages related to foreign affairs	4.43	0.95	High	2
Overall	4.20	1.05	High	

According to Table 4, the IROs ranked their needs of “*Reading news related to foreign affairs containing terminology used in foreign affairs*” in the highest position of reading skills required to perform duties and job-related activities, followed by “*Reading inquiry email messages related to foreign affairs*” in 2nd place. The statements “*Reading the meeting minutes and agendas of international conferences*” and “*Reading official announcements related to foreign affairs*” were ranked 3rd and 4th, respectively. The required reading skill ranked in 5th place was “*Reading articles about current and global issues containing terminology used in foreign affairs*”, and “*Reading reports related to foreign affairs containing terminology used in foreign affairs*” was ranked in 6th place, followed by “*Reading formal or official letters*”, which was ranked in 7th place. The reading skill ranked in the lowest place was “*Reading legal documents related to foreign affairs*”. In spite of being ranked in different orders, these statements were all reported to be required reading skills with the same level of need, which was the ‘*High*’ level. Also, the overall needs of reading skills (covering statements 1–8) reported by the IROs were at the ‘*High*’ level with a mean of 4.20.

According to the results obtained from the interviews, “*Reading news related to foreign affairs about current and global issues*” was also mentioned as a reading skill required for working as IROs. The interviewees stated that they read news and articles every day as part of their daily routine.

Three interviewees indicated that they read news reports and articles to apply relevant content to their work, as did one of the UN officers. She claimed that she read news and articles and summarized the main information of the news to write talking points, which is essential for preparing diplomatic documents.

“I read the news every day to use the gist of the news for writing talking points for my supervisor. Talking points must be very up to date and factual, so it is important for me to read the news every day.” (An officer at a permanent mission)

Two consuls also claimed that they read news and articles daily to keep up to date with information related to the visa conditions of the host country because they might need to make an announcement to inform their citizens who would like to travel to that country. Equally importantly, they also needed to read news to keep up to date on current events happening in the host country, such as the pandemic situation, election day, and natural disaster in order to write alert messages to warn their citizens of an emergency event, as illustrated in the following quote.

“I read news every day not only for information about visas but also to keep up to date with the current events of the host country so that I can give alert messages to warn Thai citizens if there are any emergency situations happening in India, such as floods and the pandemic situations.” (A consul)

With reference to the triangulation of the results from questionnaires and interviews, it can be concluded that reading is perceived by IROs as one of the key skills required for performing their duties and job-related activities. In this regard, reading skills are primarily utilized to serve IROs’ tasks for two fundamental purposes (i.e., reading while performing a job and reading for a job preparation). As there are many types of documents used in diplomacy and foreign affairs, the IROs reflected on the fact that they have to read various types of documents while working, such as official announcements, official letters, inquiry email messages, diplomatic documents, and reports, all of which are aimed at transferring important messages and exchanging information with foreign counterparts. This is in contrast to Saputro and Hima (2018) who found out that reading academic textbooks and journals were two of the most important materials for IRD students in Indonesia. Equally importantly, IROs must apply reading skills to gather information and up to date with current events. Therefore, reading news articles related to foreign affairs in the local and global context is highly necessary for IROs in preparing for their duties, such as preparing talking points for supervisors and gathering information about incidents happening in host countries to publicize alert messages for their citizens. As IROs have to participate in international conferences and meetings, they also need to read the meeting minutes and agendas to prepare themselves for these important events.

Writing Skills Required by IROs

Table 5

Required Writing Skills

Writing Skills	M	SD	Need Level	Rank
1. Writing note verbales	3.83	1.20	High	3
2. Writing alert messages or precautions in an emergency situation	2.97	1.22	Moderate	10
3. Writing documents related to visa processes	3.66	1.17	High	6
4. Writing press releases related to international and foreign affairs	3.10	1.45	Moderate	9
5. Writing diplomatic correspondence and emails using correct and appropriate hierarchical titles	4.20	0.97	High	2

6. Taking notes while listening (e.g., speeches, remarks, and presentations)	4.28	1.01	High	1
7. Writing formal speeches (e.g., opening and closing remarks)	3.33	1.47	Moderate	8
8. Writing letters for various occasions (e.g., congratulations, appreciation, condolences, and invitations)	3.70	1.15	High	5
9. Writing letters related to official visits (e.g., request or acceptance for a visit)	3.71	1.24	High	4
10. Writing the meeting minutes and agendas of international conferences	3.39	1.17	Moderate	7
Overall	3.61	1.21	High	

Table 5 demonstrates that the IROs ranked the statement “*Taking notes while listening (e.g., speeches, remarks, and presentations)*” as the highest among all the needs of writing skills to perform duties and job-related activities, followed by the statement “*Writing diplomatic correspondence and emails using correct and appropriate hierarchical titles*”. The statement “*Writing note verbales*” was ranked in 3rd place, while “*Writing letters related to official visits (e.g., request or acceptance for a visit)*” was ranked in 4th place. The required writing skill ranked in 5th place was “*Writing letters for various occasions (e.g., congratulations, appreciation, condolences, and invitations)*”, followed by “*Writing documents related to visa processes*” in 6th place. Although the aforementioned statements were ranked in different orders (from 1st to 6th place), these statements were reported with the same level of needs, which was ‘High’. In addition to the skills with a high level of needs, there were four required writing skills which were reported as being at the ‘Moderate’ level of needs: “*Writing the meeting minutes and agendas of international conferences*” in 7th place, “*Writing formal speeches (e.g., opening and closing remarks)*” in 8th place, “*Writing press releases related to international and foreign affairs*” in 9th place, and “*Writing alert messages or precautions in an emergency situation*” in 10th place. In conclusion, the overall needs of writing skills (covering statements 1–10) to perform duties and job-related activities of the IROs was at the ‘High’ level with a mean of 3.61.

According to the interview results, “*Writing note verbales*” was mentioned by the interviewees as a required writing skill for IROs. Note verbales, which are used for writing correspondence between one organization and another organization concerning formal issues, are one of the most frequently written diplomatic documents, especially while working abroad. Therefore, all the interviewees wrote note verbales to correspond with, make requests to, and ask for assistance from other embassies, consulates, or international organizations.

“*I write note verbales very often, especially while posted in a foreign country, to communicate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the host country, and embassies.*” (A counselor)

In addition to “*Writing note verbales*”, the interviewees perceived “*Taking notes while listening (e.g., speeches, remarks, and presentations)*”, especially in international meetings, as an essential writing skill. One interviewee mentioned that she needed to take notes, make inferences, and interpret one language to another language straightaway. She also stressed the importance of summarizing the main idea in notetaking because writing every detail to present to her supervisors was impossible.

“*I need to take notes on the speeches or opening remarks at conferences, and I need to interpret them straightaway and summarize the main idea when reporting to my supervisors. Sometimes, I need to listen to a 20-minute speech and summarize it in only one page for my supervisors.*” (A first secretary)

“*Writing diplomatic correspondence and emails using correct hierarchical titles*” is also considered as a crucial writing skill. The interviewees reported that using correct and appropriate hierarchical titles in all formal correspondence was necessary for working as IROs.

“*It is essential to write diplomatic correspondence with correct hierarchical titles, and the format of each piece of correspondence must be carefully chosen.*” (A consul)

The interviewees also perceived “*Writing letters for various occasions (e.g., congratulations, appreciation, condolences, and invitations)*” as a writing skill required for working as IROs. They mentioned that letters of congratulations and condolence were specifically important and were written frequently, especially while working in country-based or bilateral sections, such as the Department of American and South Pacific Affairs and the Department of European Affairs.

“Working as a United States desk officer, I need to write a lot of congratulations and condolence letters for the U.S. On election day, for example, I need to prepare a letter of congratulations congratulating the new president. When there is a disaster, such as a tragic event happening in the States, a letter of condolence must be sent to share our most profound sadness.” (A counsellor)

Most interviewees, except those working for the UN, frequently use the skill of “*Writing press releases related to international and foreign affairs*” in their routines. For example, two interviewees working in the Department of Information mentioned that they were responsible for writing press releases to give information on a particular matter to the public.

“While working in the Department of Information, my main responsibility is to write press releases giving information on various occasions to the public; therefore, I write press releases very often, including for official visits, international conferences, and so on.” (A first secretary)

Although the Department of Information is in charge of writing press releases, officers working for other departments may also write press releases. For example, those working for the Department of International Organization in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) noted that they needed to write press releases, especially when they were hosting or attending a conference. As a result, they wrote press releases and sent them to the Department of Information to publish on the website.

Apart from writing press releases, three interviewees working for a consulate, or a consular section, wrote alert messages very often and regarded “*Writing alert messages or precautions in an emergency situation*” as a required writing skill. They mentioned that alert messages were frequently used in consulates to warn their citizens of what was happening and advise them to take precautions regarding a particular matter, such as the pandemic and natural disasters. Interestingly, according to a Thai IRO, due to the fact that alert messages are used to warn Thai people of various situations in the host country, alert messages are written in both Thai and English to make it simple for Thai citizens to understand the messages.

“I write alert messages to warn Thai citizens to be aware of pandemic situations, and I have to write three versions, Thai, English, and Chinese, to make everyone understand the content of the messages.”
(An officer in the Thailand Trade and Economic Office)

In relation to the triangulation of the results obtained from the questionnaires and interviews, writing skills are essentially required by IROs for the purpose of interactions in diplomacy and foreign affairs. Due to the importance of writing skills in diplomacy and foreign affairs, IROs have to write diplomatic correspondence and documents in their daily routines. These pieces of writing include note verbales, emails and letters relating to various occasions (e.g., congratulations, appreciation, condolence, and invitations), and letters and emails regarding official visits (e.g., request or acceptance for a visit). This is in line with Saputro and Hima (2018) who stated that writing diplomatic correspondence was the most important writing skill for IRD students in Indonesia. Additionally, as these pieces of writing are diplomatic documents, they must be written with appropriate hierarchical titles. Apart from writing diplomatic documents, writing for communicating with the public sector is one of IROs’ daily tasks, which include the writing of press releases, alert messages, and documents related to visa processes. Interestingly, alert messages and documents related to visa processes are written for their home citizens and local people to act on; therefore, the language used needs to be more formal to ensure the delivery of clear messages

to them. Significantly, writing documents related to international meetings, conferences, or other international events is also a necessity for IROs. Documents related to these events include formal speeches, meeting minutes, and meeting agendas. Moreover, summarizing main ideas and taking notes while listening to presentations, speeches, and remarks at international events are considered writing skills required by IROs to perform their duties.

Comparison of the Four English Language Skills (i.e., Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) Required by IROs

Table 6

Comparison of the Four English Skills Required by IROs to Perform Duties and Job-Related Activities

Four English Skills Required by IROs	Source of Variances	df	SS	MS	F
	Between Groups	3	149.85	49.95	77.92
Within Group	1596	1023.13	00.64		
Total	1599	1172.98			

*sig at a p-value level of ≤ 0.05

Table 6 illustrates the comparison of the mean scores of the needs of the four English language skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) required by the international relations officers computed through one-way ANOVA. Through the one-way ANOVA, it was determined that the mean scores among needs of these four skills (with $F = 77.92$) had a p-value of 0.000. This demonstrates a statistically significant difference between the four English skills required by IROs to perform duties and job-related activities.

Table 7

Multiple Comparisons of the Mean Scores of the Four English Skills Required by IROs to Perform Duties and Job-Related Activities

The Four English Skills Required by IROs	M	SD				
			1	2	3	4
Listening Skills	4.11	0.98	-	.000*	.486	.000*
Speaking Skills	3.64	1.07		-	.000*	.952
Reading Skills	4.20	1.05			-	.000*
Writing Skills	3.61	1.21				-

*sig at a p-value level of ≤ 0.05

Table 7 shows the multiple comparisons of the mean scores of the needs of the four English skills required by the international relations officers to perform their duties and job-related activities. As there were significant differences among the four mean scores of the needs of English skills, the post-hoc comparisons using Dunnett's test were administered to obtain detailed comparisons among the mean scores of the needs of the four English skills. The results of Dunnett's test indicated that the mean score of the needs of listening skills (Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.98) was significantly higher than that of speaking skills (Mean = 3.64, SD = 1.07) and writing skills (Mean = 3.61, SD = 1.21) at a p-value of 0.00. However, there was no significant difference between the mean score of the needs of listening skills and the mean score of the needs of reading skills (Mean = 4.20, SD = 1.05). Moreover, when comparing the mean score of the needs of reading skills with the mean scores of speaking and writing skills, the results confirmed that the mean score of the needs of reading skills was significantly higher than the mean scores of speaking

and writing skills at a p-value of 0.000. Nevertheless, the mean score of the needs of speaking skills did not significantly differ from that of writing skills.

In summary, the post-hoc multiple comparisons among the mean scores of the needs of the four English skills demonstrated no significant difference between the needs of listening and the needs of reading skills. However, the needs of these two skills were significantly higher than those of both speaking and writing skills. Additionally, despite their lower level of needs, the needs of speaking skills and the needs of writing skills were not significantly different.

Based on the comparisons among the needs of the four English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), it can be concluded that listening and reading skills are highly required for performing IROs' tasks. IROs normally use these two receptive skills because as IROs, they need to gather information to construct their knowledge for communicating with their foreign counterparts. This result is aligned with Saputro and Hima (2018) who expressed that it was more imperative for IRD students to practice reading rather than writing in order to be familiar with international contexts. However, this does not mean that IROs do not extensively use speaking and writing to perform their duties. On the contrary, these two productive skills are also essential because IROs must accurately and appropriately deliver messages to foreign colleagues and visitors after collecting information by utilizing listening and reading skills.

English Language Skills Needed to Be Included in English for International Relations Officers Course

Selecting and organizing teaching topics into appropriate learning units are considered significant processes in designing a course, especially for ESP courses in which both language skills and content are taught within classrooms. Furthermore, many ESP scholars (e.g., Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991) propose that topics included in ESP courses should be relevant to the target situations in which ESP learners will function as specialists. To achieve this, TSA plays a significant part in determining specific English language skills that learners should master to successfully handle the target situations. Utilizing the Skill-centered Course Design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), which is an ESP course design specifically aimed at enhancing learners' English skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) required for coping with a target situation, the researchers conducted TSA to analyze English skills required by IROs to perform duties and job-related activities in relation to theoretical views of language. Based on these findings, five main topics and specific skills to be included in English for International Relations Officers course are proposed and arranged as follows.

Topic 1: Introduction to International Relations

- **Reading:** Read news, articles, and reports containing terminology used in international relations and foreign affairs
- **Writing:** Summarize news, articles, and reports related to international relations and foreign affairs
- **Listening:** Listen to news reports, talks, and speeches related to international relations and foreign affairs (a variety of English accents should be included in listening tracks)
- **Speaking:** Deliver information to foreign colleagues and visitors with correct usage of terminology, appropriate non-verbal language, and awareness of cultural differences and political sensitivity

Topic 2: Correspondence and Letters in International Relations

- **Reading:** Read diplomatic letters, emails, and documents containing the use of diplomatic ranks and terminology
- **Writing:** Write diplomatic letters of various occasions with the correct usage of diplomatic ranks and terminology
- **Listening:** Listen to conversations containing the usage of diplomatic ranks and terminology
- **Speaking:** Give information written in diplomatic letters, emails, and documents to foreign colleagues

Topic 3: Documents in International Relations

- **Reading:** Read note verbales, documents related to visa processes, alert messages, and press releases related to international relations and foreign affairs
- **Writing:** Write note verbales, documents related to visa processes, alert messages, and press releases
- **Listening:** Listen to conversations about visa processes
- **Speaking:** Give information about visa processes with correct usage of terminology, appropriate non-verbal language, and awareness of cultural differences and political sensitivity

Topic 4: International Visits

- **Reading:** Read news, official announcements, and articles containing information about types and protocols of international visits
- **Writing:** Write letters related to official visits (e.g., request and acceptance for a visit)
- **Listening:** Listen to conversations related to international visits
- **Speaking:** Give information about international visits with correct usage of terminology, appropriate non-verbal language, and awareness of cultural differences and political sensitivity

Topic 5: International Conferences

- **Reading:** Read meeting minutes and agendas of international conferences
- **Writing:** Write meeting minutes and agendas of international conferences
- **Listening:** Listen to presentations and discussions in seminars, conferences, and meetings (a variety of English accents should be included in listening tracks)
- **Speaking:** Have discussions in meetings and debate with foreign colleagues and visitors with the correct usage of diplomatic ranks and terminology

Conclusion and Implications

As English for International Relations Officers represents a new ESP course, TSA is recommended for teachers and course developers to identify the English language skills that should be included in the course. With the application of TSA, teachers and course developers can ensure that they design ESP courses that allow learners to master specific English skills required for effectively working in this professional context. In this regard, the modification of Skill-centered Course Design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) with Target Situation Analysis (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991) was applied as the conceptual framework to analyze English language skills required by IROs to perform their duties and job-related activities as well as to identify English language skills needed to be included in an English for International Relations Officers course. The triangulation of the results obtained from

the questionnaires and interviews demonstrates that several specific listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are highly required for performing IROs' tasks. Based on these results, the researchers propose that the course syllabus of English for International Relations Officers should cover five main topics (i.e., Introduction to International Relations, Correspondence and Letters in International Relations, Documents in International Relations, International Visits, and International Conferences) and emphasize the specific English skills necessarily required for mastering each topic.

In addition to shedding on the topics and specific English skills needed to be included in English for International Relations Officers course, the current study illustrates a practical approach to ESP course design and provides implications for improving ESP practices, particularly in Thai educational contexts. One way to improve ESP teaching in Thailand is by encouraging ESP teachers and practitioners to deliberately design ESP courses based on needs analysis results. More specifically, ESP courses should be designed in relation to ESP learners' language requirements concerning the target situations in which they would like to function as a specialist. Therefore, it is imperative that conducting TSA to identify the target situation and analyze the skills required to handle the target situation must be taken into consideration in designing ESP courses and selecting ESP materials. By conducting TSA, ESP course designers can ensure that the ESP courses are developed in alignment with each profession's requirements and encompass specific English skills learners require to perform duties and job-related activities in real professional contexts.

Furthermore, in order to achieve a comprehensive NA, Robinson (1991) recommends that Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Target Situation Analysis (TSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) should be orchestrated. The current study, however, emphasizes only the application of TSA to identify learners' language requirements concerning the target situation. The lack of PSA (i.e., the analysis of learners' current English proficiency level and attitudes toward language learning) and LSA (i.e., the analysis of learners' reasons for learning and efficacious learning methods) might cause some limitations of this study. While the current study meaningfully provides a guideline for ESP teachers and course designers to develop ESP courses in relation to professional information regarding the English language skills that learners may require to cope with the target situation, further studies should be undertaken with the application of PSA and LSA. By expanding the scope of a study to cover PSA and LSA, the employment of certain language aspects, teaching methods, and class activities of a newly developed ESP course will be appropriately designed to meet the specific needs of the learners and be aligned with the language requirements of their professions.

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