

ENGLISH NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR ECONOMICS STUDENTS: AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

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Abstract

Learning specific English relevant to the work field has currently been necessary for students studying in a specific subject field. Designing an English course for EFL students learning in a specific subject field requires a needs analysis. This research aims to investigate target needs of EFL students learning in economics field in order to be able to communicate both personally or professionally. The purpose of this research is also for developing an English syllabus for economics students based on the needs analysis. Through exploratory research design, this research involved 67 students from Economics Major in the third semester. The data about students' target needs of English were collected through questionnaires adapted from Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998), Hutchinson & Waters (1987), and Nation & Macalister (2010). Based on the needs analysis, the results revealed that the English teaching should integrate four English skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) to accommodate the students' needs.

Keywords: *english for specific purposes, language curriculum, needs analysis*

INTRODUCTION

As the era of globalization, English has an important role in international communication, namely the language used as an official language between countries both oral and written. This is driven by the development of technology and trade between countries that require people to learn and use English. This is in line with Harmer (2007:11) stating that: “*many people learn English because they think it will be useful in some ways for international communication*”. In other words, having adequate English language skills is an important competence in the era of globalization to be able to communicate with the international community.

In response to the importance of mastering English, teaching English that is relevant to the needs of the job market that demands English proficiency in certain fields is seen as very important. Designing an English learning curriculum that is relevant to the needs of work field requires an analysis of English language needs. According to Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998), needs analysis aims to prepare students to have English proficiency in a professional or academic context so that knowing the students' needs regarding English to be used by students is very important (see, Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Furthermore, Hutchinson & Waters (1987) argues that needs analysis is a

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fundamental characteristic of an English program for special purposes. This is because the needs of English between one special field is different from other fields. Needs analysis also has implications for the development of teaching materials and syllabi. However, in practice a lot of ESP learning developed is not based on needs analysis so there is a gap between the objectives of the ESP program and the English competencies needed in the professional field. In other words, the program was developed based on the assumptions and teachers' personal opinions.

Based on the background as described previously, this study aims to investigate the needs of English (target needs) needed by students, especially economics, to be able to communicate both personally and professionally. In addition, this study seeks to develop learning syllabus according to the results of the students' English needs analysis. Therefore, the questions proposed in this study are as follows

1. What are the students' needs of English majoring in Economics?
2. What are the students' responses on their English needs?

Before defining what needs analysis, the term 'needs' must be identified. There are various definitions of the term needs offered by several experts. For Richards (2001: 54), needs are often associated with linguistic deficiencies that illustrate the difference between what a learner can currently do in a language and what he should be able to do. He also explained that the definition of needs depends on the assessment of the teacher, students, parents, and other stakeholders. However, Porcher (in Richards, 2001: 54) offers a different view that needs do not have an objective reality that already exists, but are built, "the center of conceptual networks and products of a number of epistemological choices."

Regarding the term needs, Brindley (in Lopez, 1997: 118) distinguishes

between objective needs and subjective needs, as explained in the following excerpt:

The first term refers to the needs that come from various types of factual information about students, their use of language in real life communication situations as well as current language skills and language difficulties. The second term refers to the cognitive and affective needs of learners in learning situations, derived from information about affective and cognitive factors such as personality, self-confidence, attitudes, desires and expectations of learners relating to English learning and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies.

Another view of the definition of needs was proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who advocated a learning-centered approach in the design of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) lessons. They describe needs as necessities, lacks, and wants. Needs come from the demands of the target situation, and this requirement relates to "what students must know in order to function effectively in the target situation" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 55). It is not enough to simply identify needs, because ESP focuses on the needs of specific students. It is also important to identify students' lacks, namely the gap between target skills and existing students' skills (ibid: 56.) Regarding wants, Hutchinson and Waters (ibid: 56) define the role of learner's views as what they want to learn. Nation and Macalister (2010: 25) suggest that the term of necessities fits into required knowledge; lacks fit into present knowledge; and wants fit into subjective needs. The definitions of needs from Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Nation

and Macalister (2010) are taken in this study.

Regarding the definition of needs analysis, some experts have different perspectives. Brindley (in Lopez 1997: 117) describes the needs analysis as an attempt to identify and consider a variety of cognitive and affective variables which influence learning such as learners' motivation, attitudes, personality, awareness, expectation, wants, and learning styles. Brown (1995: 36) identifies needs analysis as

"...the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation."

From Brown's definition, it can be inferred that needs analysis covers the information of the students' necessities, lacks, and wants for curriculum design that affects the learning and teaching situation.

Another perspective is offered by Evans and John (1998: 121) which defines needs analysis as "the process of determining what and how a lesson". Hyland (2006: 73) also points out that needs analysis is "a technique for gathering and assessing information relevant to the design of subjects: this is a way to determine how and what a course looks like." In conclusion, needs analysis might be defined as a process of gathering information of the learners' necessities, lacks, and wants for the basis of establishing what and how of a course. Afterward, the result of needs analysis is "a realistic list of language, ideas or skill items, as a result of considering the present proficiency, future needs and wants of the learners" (Nation and Macalister, 2010: 1) which influence the course design (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 76).

An ESP course requires a curriculum that finds the students' needs for effective learning. Consequently, needs analysis cannot be separated from ESP because it is "a key feature of ESP course design" (Basturkmen, 2006: 17), the first stage in ESP (Richards, 2001: 32) before "course design, materials selection, teaching and learning, and evaluation" (Evan and St. John, 1998: 121), and it will assist teachers in "drawing up a 'profile' to establish coherent objectives, and take subsequent decisions on course content" (Mc Donough, 1984: 29).

For Brown (1995), needs analysis is one of the crucial elements in the development of a language curriculum. Needs analysis is interrelated with objectives, testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation (ibid: 20). It can be figured out that the objectives of the learning can be identified after conducting needs analysis and the objectives will be related to the needs analysis. In line with Brown, Nation and Macalister (2010) also put needs analysis as one of the parts of the curriculum design process. In addition, Nation and Macalister (ibid: 1) also suggest that needs analysis (together with principles and environment analysis) will have "a major effect in guiding the actual process of course production." Therefore, "determining the focus of a course may be based on findings from needs analysis." (Basturkmen, 2010: 53)

METHOD

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the English language needs of students in the Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business. This research is categorized as a qualitative descriptive study, because this study illustrates the quality of learning situations experienced by students.

Setting and Participant

This research was conducted at the Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business. This place was chosen because of the accessibility and familiarity of the situation and participants. The consideration of doing this research in this place is also because students in this tertiary institution study a particular subject area, so they may need specific English, referred to as ESP which is designed to meet the specific needs of students and is related to or designed for certain disciplines.

This study involved around 67 students of the Department of Economics in the third semester. The selection of participants in the third semester aims to evaluate English learning beforehand and find out information about the needs of students in learning English. They have formally studied English in semesters one and two, and their English skills vary from elementary to intermediate levels.

Data Collection

The main instrument used in data collection is a questionnaire. The questionnaire as the main research instrument explores information about students' English needs. In addition, this questionnaire reveals data about the

language skills they need in the work field. Students will provide an assessment through a Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Existing Situation

The students' existing situation was gained from present situation analysis. The present situation analysis seeks for the information about the students' present knowledge and skills in English. The types of information representing the students' present knowledge and skills are about the students' ability and their experience in English mastery. The students' present knowledge and lacks are two of various factors to consider in language course design (Nation and Macalister, 2010: 1)

The Students' Experience of English Skills

This section describes what skills the students have learned in the previous learning situation during two semesters. Based on the students' responses to the questionnaire it can be inferred that the students practiced the four English skills in the previous semester. The following figure depicts the students' experience of English skills.

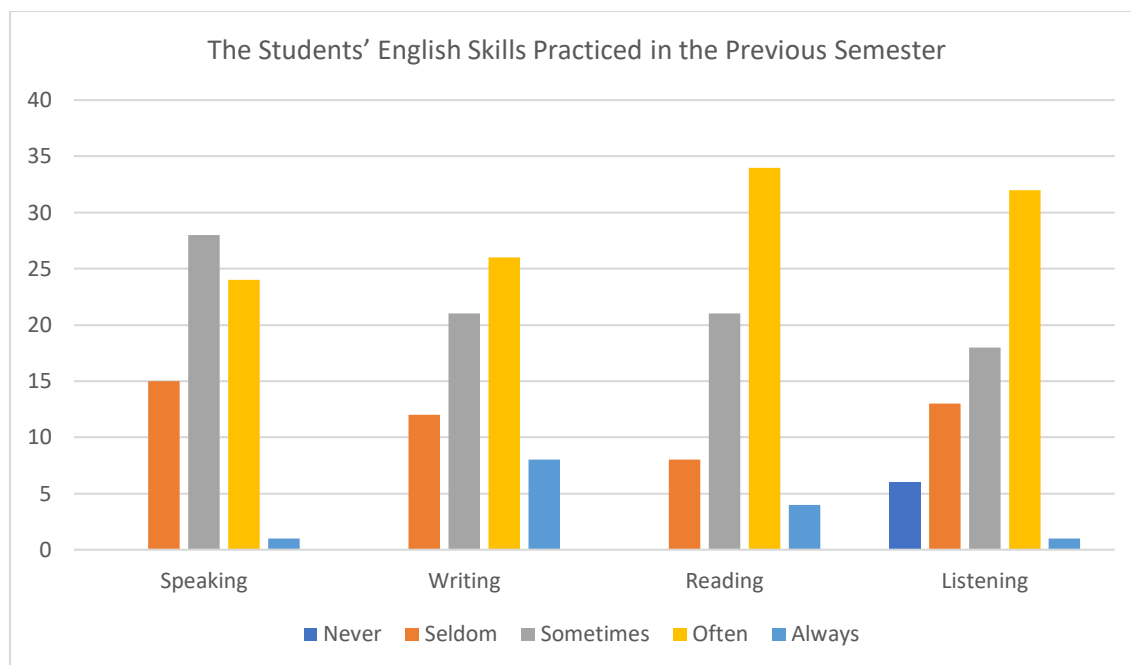


Figure 1. *The Students' English Skills Practiced in the Previous Semester*

Based on the graphic in Figure 1, it can be inferred that the students perceived that in the previous learning experience they learned English with various skills, but

mostly with reading skill (34 students or 50,74%) and listening skill (32 students or 47,76%).

The Students' Lacks on English Skills

Based on the students' responses to the questionnaire, the students participated in this research had passed basic English grammar and skills in the previous two semesters. It can be inferred that at present situation they have basic knowledge in

English. However, based on the questionnaire, the students perceived that they still have problems with English skills in use. The following figure depicts the students' present skills that the students' find difficult.

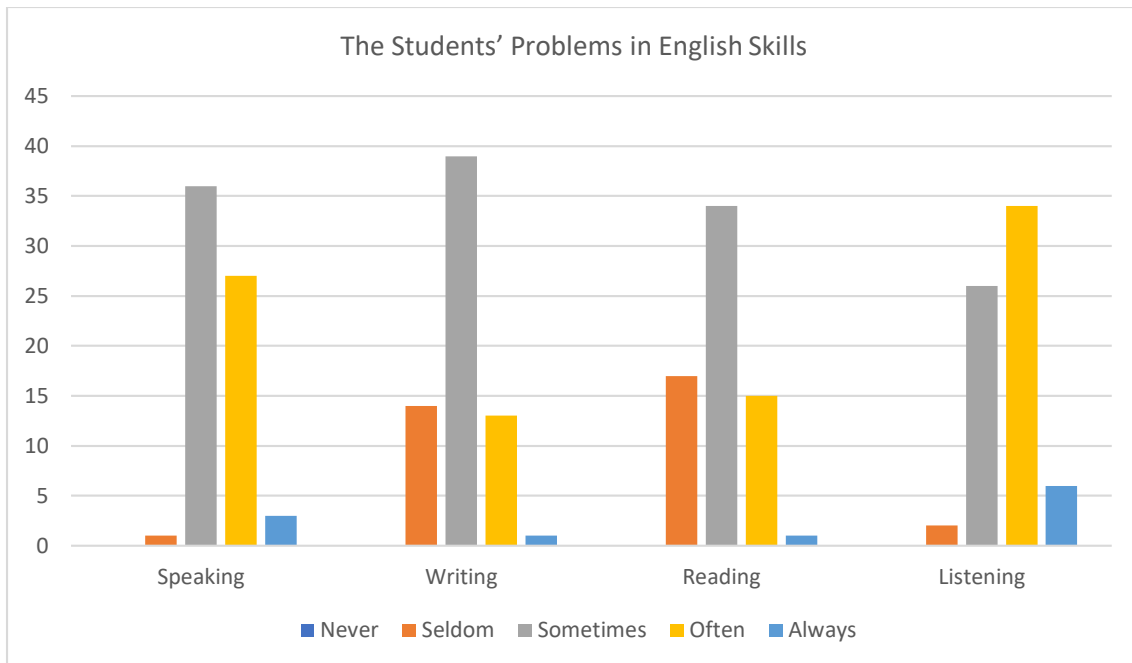


Figure 2. *The Students' Problems in English Skills*

The graphic in Figure 2 shows the students' responses on their English skills used in the classroom. As seen from the graphic, it can be inferred that most students sometimes find difficulty to practice writing skill (39 responses or 58,2%). They also sometimes find difficulty in practicing speaking skill (36 responses or 53.73%), reading skill (34 responses or 50.74%), and listening skill (26 responses or 38.8%). In addition, students also mostly often find difficulty to practice listening skill (34 responses or 50,74%) and speaking skill (27 responses or 40,29%). Therefore, based on the data, it can be inferred that the students still have problems with the four English skills, particularly listening skill and speaking skill.

The Students' Expected Situation

The Students' Preferences of English Skills

The results from the questionnaire about the students' expectation in learning English revealed that the students want to learn English with various different skills. By considering the highest frequency responses from the students, it can be inferred from Figure 3 that speaking skill seems to be the students' most expected English skill to learn English with at present learning (54 responses or 80,59%). Listening skill gets the second highest frequency responses (52 responses or 77,61%) that the students want to learn English with at present learning. Writing skill (44 responses or 65,67%) and reading skill (44 responses or 65,67%) also have high responses from the students. The following Figure 3 represents the results from the questionnaire about the students' expected English skills at present learning.

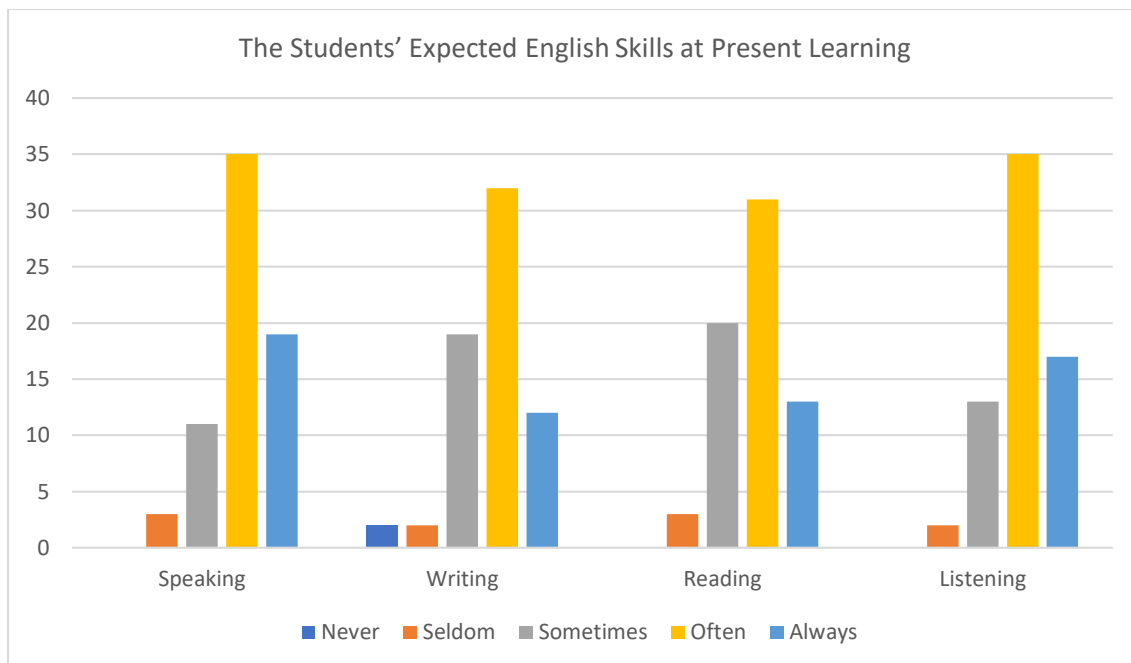


Figure 3. *The Students' Expected English Skills at Present Learning*

From Figure 3, it can be inferred that the students expected to learn those English language skills, but speaking skill was mostly expected by the students to learn English with. Therefore, to facilitate all of the students with various expectations in learning English, the lecturers should teach the students those language skills, with the highest emphasis on the speaking skill, since it might motivate the students in learning English. The learning based on the learners' needs may improve the learners' motivation and can make learning better and faster (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 8).

In addition, based on the students' responses from the questionnaire, the students' most necessary English skill for improvement is speaking skill (60 responses or 89,55%). Listening skill gets the second highest responses (58 responses or 86,56%) from the students as expected English skill for improvement. Reading skill (56 responses or 83,58%) and writing skill (54 responses or 80,59%) also obtain high responses from the students as expected English skill for improvement. The following Figure 4 represents the students' responses on the students' expected English skill for improvement.

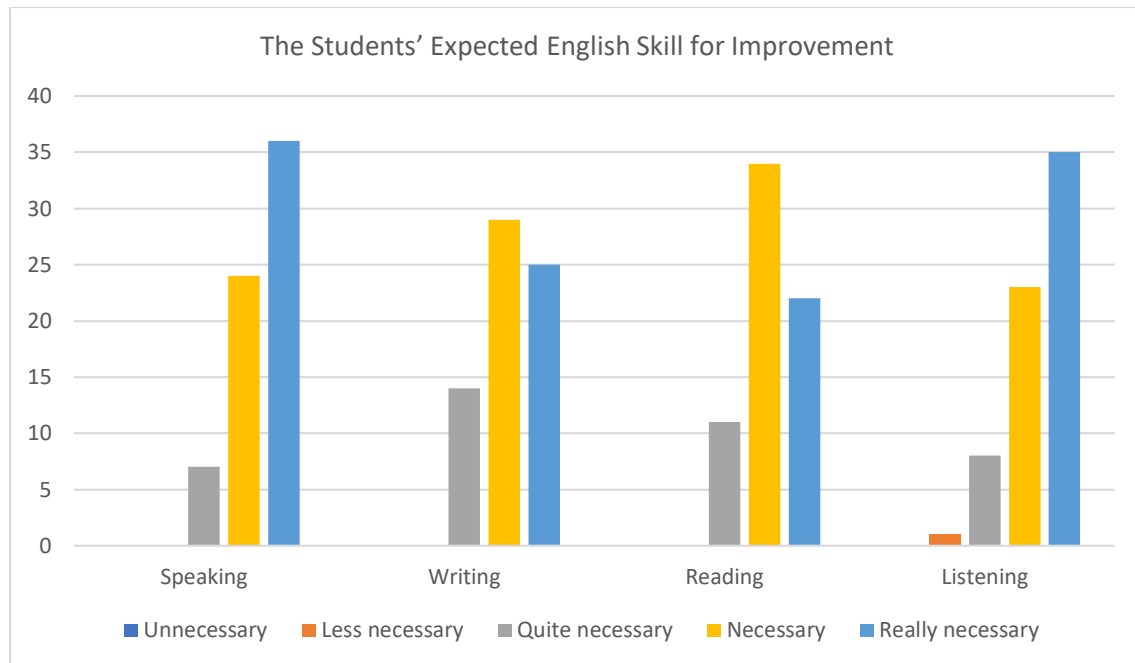


Figure 4. *The Students' Expected English Skill for Improvement*

From Figure 4, it can be inferred that the students expected to improve those English language skills, but speaking skill seems to be mostly expected for improvement for the students. In order to facilitate all of the students with various expectations in improving English skills, the lecturers should integrate skills when teaching them English, with the highest emphasis on the speaking skill which might motivate in learning English, since the learning is in line with their wants.

The Students' Speaking Sub-Skills for Improvement

For speaking sub-skills, as seen in Table 4, it can be inferred that most students perceived that all of their speaking sub-skills need improvement, particularly on “doing formal conversation” and “doing formal discussion in a group” with the same highest responses. The following Table 4 represents the students’ responses on speaking sub-skills for improvement.

Table 4. *The Students' Speaking Sub-Skills for Improvement*

Speaking sub-skills	Number of responses	Percentage
doing formal conversation	55	82.08%
doing formal discussion in a group	55	82.08%
explaining data from graphics or diagrams	50	74.62%
performing a speech with a certain topic	48	71.64%
doing debates	41	61.19%

Based on Table 4, it can be inferred that all of the speaking sub-skills should be included in the English learning activities to facilitate the students’ wants.

The Students' Reading Sub-Skills for Improvement

For reading sub-skills, as seen in Table 1, it can be inferred that all of the reading sub-skills obtain high responses from the students as reading sub-skills for improvement, particularly on “understanding some vocabularies from a

text” given the most responses from the students for improvement. The following table (Table 1) represents the students’

responses on reading sub-skills for improvement.

Table 1. *The Students’ Reading Sub-Skills for Improvement*

Reading sub-skills	Number of responses	Percentage
understanding some vocabularies from a text	59	88.06%
understanding specific information	58	86.57%
understanding the main idea from a text	56	83.58%
understanding the text structure	54	80.59%
making a summary from a text	51	76.11%
reading faster	50	74.62%

Based on Table 1, it can be inferred that all of the reading sub-skills should be included in the students’ English learning activities to facilitate their wants in order to motivate them in learning English.

perceived that all of their listening sub-skills need improvement, particularly on “understanding a topic in a conversation”, understanding a conversation in general’, and “understanding an instruction from someone.” The following table represents the students’ responses on listening sub-skills for improvement.

The Students’ Listening Sub-Skills for Improvement

For listening sub-skills, as seen in Table 2, it can be inferred that the students

Table 2. *The Students’ Listening Sub-Skills for Improvement*

Listening sub-skills	Number of responses	Percentage
understanding a topic in a conversation	61	91.04%
understanding a conversation in general	60	89.55%
understanding an instruction from someone	60	89.55%
general understanding of a short speech	50	74.62%
writing specific information from a speech	48	71.64%

Based on Table 2, it can be inferred that all of the listening sub-skills should be included in the English learning activities to facilitate the students’ wants.

The Students’ Writing Sub-Skills for Improvement

For writing sub-skills, as seen in Table 3, it can be inferred that most students perceived that all of their writing sub-skills need improvement, particularly on “writing a report”. The following Table 3 represents the students’ responses on writing sub-skills for improvement.

Table 3. *The Students' Writing Sub-Skills for Improvement*

Writing sub-skills	Number of responses	Percentage
writing a report	55	82.08%
writing a summary from various reading sources	52	77.61%
writing and responding a formal letter through e-mail	51	76.11%
writing a text with a certain topic	49	73.13%
writing sentences into a paragraph	48	71.64%
writing a procedural text	48	71.64%

Based on Table 3, it can be inferred that all of the writing sub-skills should be included in the English learning activities to facilitate the students' wants.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to investigate the English language needs of university students in the Department of Economy, Faculty of Economy and Business. The questionnaire was distributed to 67 students who participated voluntarily to find out their responses on needs of English. The information collected from the participants includes the existing situation and the expected situation. The existing situation describes the information about the students' experience and lacks of English, and the expected situation describes the information about the students' preferences of English skills and the students' needs of English sub-skills for improvement.

The information about the existing situation shows that the students have basic knowledge of English and have experienced various skills in learning English, but they still have problems with the four English skills, particularly listening skill and speaking skill. The information about the expected situation shows that the students expected to learn various English language skills, but speaking skill was mostly expected to learn by the students. In order to fulfill this expectation and motivate the students in learning English, the English lecturers should teach the students those language skills, with the highest emphasis on the speaking skill. The information from

the expected situation also shows that the students need to improve various English sub-skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening sub-skills. Based on these results, it can be inferred that the English course for students of Economy and Business should consider the students' needs and wants in order to motivate them in learning English.

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