

English Language Needs Analysis for Islamic Economic Law Students in Indonesian Higher Education: A Case Study at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai

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ABSTRACT

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English proficiency is increasingly important for students of Islamic Economic Law, yet English instruction in many Islamic higher education institutions remains oriented toward General English rather than English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This study aimed to identify the English language needs of Islamic Economic Law students at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. A mixed-methods case study was conducted involving 35 undergraduate students. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that legal English vocabulary was the highest learning priority (42.9%), followed by academic reading (25.7%), professional writing (14.3%), speaking (11.4%), and listening (5.7%). Students also preferred authentic learning materials related to Islamic banking, commercial law, contracts, and dispute resolution, as well as interactive learning activities such as case studies, role plays, group discussions, and problem-based learning. The study concludes that English instruction should be redesigned based on ESP principles by integrating discipline-specific vocabulary, authentic legal materials, and professional communication tasks to better support students' academic achievement and career preparation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of globalization has significantly transformed higher education, requiring university graduates to possess not only disciplinary expertise but also adequate English language proficiency. English functions as the primary language of international academic communication, scientific publication, cross-border business, and legal cooperation. Consequently, students enrolled in specialized disciplines are increasingly expected to acquire English competencies relevant to their future professions rather than relying solely on general language knowledge. Within Indonesian higher education, this expectation is particularly evident in Islamic Economic Law, a multidisciplinary field

combining Islamic jurisprudence, economics, finance, banking, business law, and commercial dispute resolution. Graduates frequently interact with international legal documents, Islamic banking regulations, scholarly publications, and financial institutions operating within a global context. Therefore, mastery of English, especially discipline-specific vocabulary and communication skills, is becoming an indispensable professional competency.

Despite these demands, English courses offered in many Islamic higher education institutions continue to adopt General English syllabi with limited relevance to students' academic disciplines. Teaching materials often emphasize everyday conversations, basic grammar, and general reading passages instead of legal terminology, Islamic financial concepts, contract interpretation, or academic writing. Such mismatches reduce students' motivation because learners struggle to perceive the practical relevance of English to their future careers. Similar findings have been reported in studies involving Islamic Economics and Islamic Banking students, where limited legal vocabulary and non-contextual teaching materials were identified as major obstacles to effective learning.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as an effective approach to addressing these challenges. Unlike General English, ESP is designed according to learners' academic and occupational needs. The primary objective of ESP is to equip students with language competencies directly applicable to their professional contexts. Needs analysis therefore constitutes the cornerstone of ESP because it systematically investigates learners' present language abilities, target language requirements, preferred learning styles, and contextual expectations before instructional materials are developed. Studies consistently emphasize that well-designed ESP courses should be grounded in empirical needs analysis rather than assumptions made by instructors or institutions.

Previous studies have examined English needs among students of Islamic Economics, Islamic Banking, Communication and Islamic Broadcasting, and other Islamic higher education programs. These studies generally conclude that learners require contextualized English materials incorporating professional terminology, authentic texts, and communicative tasks. However, very limited research has specifically investigated the English language needs of Islamic Economic Law students, particularly within private Islamic higher education institutions in North Sumatra. Existing studies also tend to focus primarily on general ESP without exploring the integration of legal English, Islamic commercial law, and academic communication into one comprehensive curriculum. This gap highlights the necessity of conducting a systematic needs analysis for Islamic Economic Law students at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. As one of the Islamic higher education institutions committed to producing graduates capable of competing nationally and internationally, the institution requires empirical evidence to redesign its English curriculum according to students' academic and professional demands.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a learner-centered approach that develops English language competencies based on learners' academic and professional needs. Unlike English for General Purposes (EGP), ESP emphasizes discipline-specific language, authentic communication, and contextualized learning activities that prepare learners for real-world

situations. Recent reviews show that ESP research has expanded considerably, particularly in higher education, reflecting the growing demand for specialized English in professional and academic settings. Current ESP instruction focuses not only on language proficiency but also on developing communicative competence within specific disciplinary contexts. Effective ESP courses integrate authentic materials, task-based learning, collaborative activities, and workplace-oriented communication to enhance learners' readiness for future careers. These developments demonstrate that ESP has evolved into an interdisciplinary field connecting language education with professional practice. For students of Islamic Economic Law, ESP plays a significant role because English is increasingly required for reading international legal literature, understanding Islamic financial regulations, participating in professional communication, and accessing global academic resources. Therefore, English instruction should be contextualized according to the linguistic demands of Islamic commercial law and Islamic finance.

2.2. Needs Analysis in ESP

Needs analysis remains the fundamental component of ESP course design because it identifies the gap between learners' current language abilities and the competencies required in academic or professional contexts. Contemporary ESP research emphasizes that needs analysis should be viewed as an ongoing process involving students, lecturers, institutions, and workplace stakeholders to ensure that language instruction remains relevant and responsive to changing demands. Recent systematic reviews indicate that questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document analysis are the most frequently employed instruments in ESP needs analysis. The increasing use of mixed-methods research has also strengthened the reliability of needs assessment by combining quantitative and qualitative evidence. Needs analysis generally explores three dimensions: 1) learners' present language proficiency; 2) target language requirements for future academic and professional situations; and 3) preferred learning methods, materials, and classroom activities. These dimensions enable curriculum developers to design English courses that are relevant, practical, and learner-centered.

2.3. Present Situation, Target Situation, and Learning Situation Analysis

A comprehensive ESP needs analysis involves examining learners from multiple perspectives. Present Situation Analysis (PSA) investigates learners' current English proficiency and identifies strengths and weaknesses across language skills. Target Situation Analysis (TSA) examines the communicative tasks learners are expected to perform in their future academic studies or professional careers. Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) explores learners' preferences regarding instructional methods, classroom interaction, learning resources, and assessment practices. Recent ESP studies suggest that integrating PSA, TSA, and LSA provides a more comprehensive understanding of learners' needs than relying on a single analytical perspective. Such integration supports the development of curricula that are both academically relevant and professionally applicable. For Islamic Economic Law students, PSA identifies existing English competencies, TSA determines the legal and academic communication skills required in future workplaces, while LSA guides lecturers in selecting appropriate teaching strategies that encourage active participation and meaningful learning.

2.4. English for Legal Purposes

English for Legal Purposes (ELP) is a specialized branch of ESP that prepares learners to communicate effectively within legal and judicial contexts. Contemporary legal education increasingly recognizes that law graduates require not only legal knowledge but also the ability to interpret international legal documents, participate in negotiations, prepare legal reports, and communicate across multilingual professional environments. Within Islamic Economic Law, English learning extends beyond conventional legal terminology to include concepts related to Islamic banking, Islamic finance, halal business, dispute resolution, contracts, arbitration, sukuk, waqf, zakat, and Sharia compliance. Consequently, ESP courses should integrate authentic legal documents and discipline-specific vocabulary to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace communication.

2.5. Previous Studies

Recent empirical studies consistently demonstrate the importance of needs analysis in developing effective ESP curricula. A systematic review by Pang et al. (2025) found that most higher education ESP research employs needs analysis as the foundation for curriculum development and recommends integrating multiple stakeholders to improve course relevance. Dou et al. (2023) highlighted that modern ESP has shifted toward learner-centered instruction, authentic communication, and continuous curriculum adaptation based on evolving professional demands. Their review also reaffirmed that needs analysis remains the defining characteristic of effective ESP programs.

Yan (2025), through a systematic review of 149 SSCI-indexed ESP studies, reported increasing attention to technology integration, materials development, and higher education contexts. The review suggests that future ESP research should emphasize discipline-specific learning materials, authentic assessment, and professional communication skills. Despite these advances, only limited studies have specifically examined the English language needs of Islamic Economic Law students in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Most previous research has focused on engineering, business, medicine, nursing, or Islamic banking programs, leaving Islamic Economic Law relatively underexplored.

3. METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to investigate the English language needs of Islamic Economic Law students at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. A mixed-methods approach was selected because it combines the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' English language needs, learning preferences, and professional expectations. The quantitative component was conducted through a structured questionnaire to identify students' perceived English language needs and priorities. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews that explored students' experiences, challenges, and expectations regarding English learning in greater depth. Integrating both forms of data enabled triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings. The study adopted the needs analysis framework proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Dudley-Evans

and St John (1998), which emphasizes three dimensions: Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Target Situation Analysis (TSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA).

The participants comprised 35 undergraduate students enrolled in the Islamic Economic Law Study Program during the 2025/2026 academic year. A purposive sampling technique was used because the selected students had completed at least one English course and were therefore able to reflect on their learning experiences and future language needs. The participants represented different academic achievement levels and varied English proficiency, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives regarding English language learning. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The analysis identified the English skills and learning materials considered most important by the participants. The qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021): 1) familiarization with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the final report. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students’ English language needs.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the English language needs analysis conducted among 35 students of the Islamic Economic Law Study Program at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai. The findings are organized into four themes: (1) students’ present English proficiency, (2) target language needs, (3) preferred learning materials, and (4) preferred classroom activities.

4.1. Students’ Present English Proficiency (PSA)

The first part of the questionnaire examined students’ self-perceived English proficiency.

Table 1. Students’ Self-Assessment of English Proficiency (n = 35)

Skill	High	Moderate	Low
Reading	8 (22.9%)	18 (51.4%)	9 (25.7%)
Writing	6 (17.1%)	16 (45.7%)	13 (37.2%)
Speaking	5 (14.3%)	12 (34.3%)	18 (51.4%)
Listening	4 (11.4%)	15 (42.9%)	16 (45.7%)
Vocabulary	5 (14.3%)	14 (40.0%)	16 (45.7%)

The results indicate that reading was the strongest English skill among the participants, whereas speaking, listening, and vocabulary were identified as the weakest areas. More than half of the students (51.4%) reported low confidence in speaking English, while 45.7% perceived themselves as having limited vocabulary and listening skills. These findings suggest that although students are capable of understanding written texts to some extent, they experience difficulties communicating orally and comprehending spoken English in academic contexts.

4.2. Target Language Needs (TSA)

Students were asked to identify which English competencies were most important for their academic study and future careers.

Table 2. Students' Priority English Skills

English Competency	Frequency	Percentage
Legal Vocabulary	15	42.90%
Academic Reading	9	25.70%
Professional Writing	5	14.30%
Speaking	4	11.40%
Listening	2	5.70%

The findings demonstrate that legal English vocabulary was considered the highest priority by the respondents (42.9%). Students emphasized that understanding English legal terms would enable them to read international references, interpret legal documents, and prepare for careers in Islamic banking, arbitration, and legal consultancy. Academic reading ranked second (25.7%), reflecting students' recognition of the importance of accessing English-language journals, textbooks, and legal regulations. Professional writing, including report writing, email communication, and legal correspondence, was also considered important, although fewer students selected it as their primary need.

4.3. Preferred Learning Materials

Participants identified the topics they expected to study in an ESP-based English course.

Table 3. Preferred ESP Learning Materials

Learning Topic	Percentage
Islamic Banking	88.60%
Islamic Commercial Law	85.70%
Contracts and Agreements	82.90%
Legal Vocabulary	94.30%
Business Communication	71.40%
Arbitration and Mediation	65.70%
Academic Journal Reading	77.10%
Presentation Skills	62.90%

The data reveal a strong preference for authentic and discipline-specific learning materials. Legal vocabulary (94.3%) emerged as the most preferred topic, followed by Islamic banking (88.6%) and Islamic commercial law (85.7%). These findings indicate that students value English learning that directly supports their academic studies and future professional responsibilities.

4.4. Preferred Classroom Activities (LSA)

Students also indicated the learning activities they found most engaging. The results indicate that students preferred interactive and collaborative learning approaches. Group discussions (91.4%) and case studies (88.6%) were the most popular activities, suggesting that learners appreciate opportunities to apply English in realistic legal contexts. In contrast, traditional grammar drills received the lowest level of preference (42.9%), indicating that students favor contextualized language use over isolated grammar instruction. Overall, the findings indicate that the current English curriculum does not yet fully address the specific academic and professional needs of Islamic Economic Law students. Learners expressed strong preferences for: 1) discipline-specific legal vocabulary; 2) academic reading skills; 3) authentic legal and Islamic finance materials; 4) collaborative learning activities; and 5) an ESP-oriented curriculum linked to their future careers. The convergence between the questionnaire and interview data strengthens the conclusion that a needs-based ESP curriculum is required to better support students’ academic success and professional readiness.

Table 4. Preferred Learning Activities

Activity	Percentage
Group Discussion	91.40%
Case Study	88.60%
Role Play	82.90%
Vocabulary Games	80.00%
Problem-Based Learning	77.10%
Presentation	71.40%
Translation Exercises	68.60%
Grammar Drills	42.90%

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the English language needs of students enrolled in the Islamic Economic Law Study Program at Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai using an ESP needs analysis framework. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study identified students’ current English proficiency, target language needs, and preferred learning experiences. The findings reveal that students require English instruction that is directly connected to their academic discipline and future professional careers. Legal English vocabulary emerged as the highest priority, followed by academic reading, professional writing, speaking, and listening. Students emphasized the importance of understanding English terminology related to Islamic banking, Islamic commercial law, contracts, arbitration, and international business communication. These competencies are considered essential for accessing international academic literature, interpreting legal documents, participating in professional communication, and enhancing future employability.

The study also demonstrates that students prefer authentic and contextualized learning materials rather than general English textbooks. Learning activities such as case studies, group discussions, role plays, problem-based learning, and the analysis of authentic legal documents were perceived as more engaging and effective than traditional grammar-

focused instruction. These findings reinforce the principle that ESP courses should be designed based on learners' actual academic and occupational needs. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that the current English curriculum should be redesigned to incorporate discipline-specific content, legal English terminology, academic reading strategies, and professional communication tasks relevant to Islamic Economic Law. English lecturers are encouraged to adopt student-centered instructional approaches and utilize authentic materials to improve learners' motivation, language proficiency, and professional readiness. Curriculum developers should also integrate systematic needs analysis into curriculum review processes to ensure that ESP courses remain aligned with the evolving demands of higher education and the workplace.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on English for Specific Purposes in Islamic higher education, particularly within the context of Islamic Economic Law, an area that has received relatively limited scholarly attention. The findings provide empirical evidence that can support curriculum development, teaching material design, and instructional innovation in similar academic settings. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the research involved only 35 students from a single institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focused primarily on students' perspectives and did not include the views of English lecturers, subject specialists, employers, or alumni. Third, the study examined learners' perceived needs rather than measuring actual language performance through proficiency tests.

Future research is recommended to involve multiple universities, larger and more diverse samples, and additional stakeholders to obtain a broader understanding of English language needs in Islamic higher education. Researchers may also develop and evaluate ESP teaching materials based on the needs identified in this study or investigate the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning, artificial intelligence, and digital learning platforms in improving English proficiency among Islamic Economic Law students. Overall, this study confirms that a needs-based ESP curriculum is essential for preparing Islamic Economic Law students to meet both academic and professional challenges in an increasingly globalized environment.

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