

REVISITING THE BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSES TO MEET THE STAKEHOLDERS' DEMAND

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ABSTRACT

In the international business communication, English has become a medium of communication. To respond to such a global challenge, it is vital to equip students with Business English courses to prepare them to be more competitive worldwide. Nevertheless, studying Business English is quite problematic to many non-native learners since they have to focus both on the subject matter and the language. The present study is conducted to investigate the perspectives of the students and alumni on the Business English courses at the Business Administration Department, State Polytechnic of Malang. A survey on the second-year students and the alumni was conducted. The questionnaires were distributed to elicit their views on the courses, as well as their recommendations. The existing English syllabuses and materials were collected to be overviewed. The findings indicate most students are in favor of the course. Their motivation and interest in the course are good that they make some attempts to support their Business English skills acquisition. The business English competences, like: business presentation, business meeting, business socializing, negotiation, business correspondence, and knowledge, like global business issues are of their benefits to prepare them to work and develop their career in the future. The alumni claim they apply the Business English knowledge and skills in their workplace. However, the level of the application is different following their job position in the workplace. The students' proposals for the course are that it should be presented in a more fascinating way and business communication skills are more emphasized. Besides, global business materials and vocabulary in business are to be more inserted. The alumni recommend providing more business communication practices and vocabulary enrichment. Showing the formal and informal English usage is also necessary. Besides, character building related to business needs to be inserted. The Business English syllabuses and materials were in line with the students' and alumni's expectation. The content and materials have already covered business knowledge and skills as expected by the stakeholder.

Key words: *perspectives, Business English courses, students, alumni*

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication has become one of factors demanded by people in today's era. Schorr (in Thitthongkam, 2011:2) has confirmed that in the global competition the communication ability has been the most crucial element so that people can interact widely, fast, and clearly. More importantly, the communication ability more focuses on the foreign languages (Walters in Thitthongkam,

2011). If one has a drawback in his communication, his/her business may fail. It means that one's communication skill cannot be neglected easily. To be able to communicate sufficiently, one's competence in acquiring language skills is essential.

English has been an international lingua franca used in all aspects of human's life. English is also used in Business in the global world. As stated by Wu (2013: 130), Business

English is widely applied in the international business communication, including among non-native speakers. The demand, thus, requires people not only to study business but also to study English as a medium of communication. Even, English as a corporate language has been the recent trend in Japan (Ojanperä, 2015:9). All the above-mentioned phenomena are true, indeed. As seen nowadays, people all around the world communicate their business in English as the medium to interact to each other.

According to Sulisty (2009), studying Business English is a part of studying ESP (English for Specific Purposes). More particularly, it aims at studying English for academic and occupational purposes (Sulisty, 2009). In Felecan's view (2017) ESP teaching and learning is focusing on language in context involving ESP students in the learning of real life situations which is related to their professional background. Such a characteristic typically distinguishes ESP with those of ESL (English as a Second Language and EGP (English for General Purposes).

Studying English for Business, then, may be seen as quite problematic to many non-native learners. It is due to the fact that the learners both focus on their own subject matters and the language where each course needs specific and deep understanding and competence (Voyakina and Korolyova, 2014). In this sense, the business English lessons are aimed to promote practical business skills to support students' business knowledge and skills (Guiyu and Yang, 2016). A study on the Chinese MBA students studying overseas proved they encountered problems in English oral communication and listening comprehension (Xie and Chen, 2019). In short, learning Business English can be of a challenge for the non-native learners.

The Business Administration Department, State Polytechnic of Malang has tried to respond positively to the recent phenomena. To prepare the students to be more competitive, the English language teaching and learning in this department concentrates on the Business English teaching and learning.

After years, the benefit and opportunities of Business English have not been reevaluated in this department, however. The reevaluation is needed to adjust the existing syllabus with the students' need. In this sense, the perspectives of the students are vital to view as an insight to improve and develop English syllabuses and materials relevant to the present demand of era. This is in line with the view of Voyakina and Korolyova (2014) mentioning that a foreign language learning is to be figured out from the demand of the users to determine its teaching and learning materials and method.

As a matter of fact, Business English Department, State Polytechnic of Malang has given relatively adequate time allotment to English teaching and learning in the curriculum. The English courses are plotted between 4 to 6 hours per week from the first semester to fifth semester for the students taking Diploma III program and from the first semester to seventh semester for the Diploma IV students. In the first and second semester, the students study General English which explores more on the improvement general English proficiency. The Business English courses are taught in the third and fourth semester. In the higher semesters, the English courses are made more specific going along with the students' class concentration, namely: English for Marketers, and English for Secretary.

Given the above-mentioned background, this paper is intended to investigate the main stakeholders' point of view, that is, students and alumni regarding what they need and benefit from the courses. The content of the Business English syllabuses and materials are seen as well. Both sources of data will be confirmed to ensure if they are relevant one another.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

English for Specific Purposes

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is one of the areas in Applied Linguistics and also a part of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) (Lamri, 2016). It is defined as the foreign

language teaching of specific profession, subject, or purpose (Bojovic, 2014). ESP is taught in three main areas: science and technology, business and economics, and social sciences (Sulistyo, 2009).

The teaching of ESP is meant to provide and train language learners to preparedly use the needed abilities in a specific field of inquiry, occupation, or workplace (Lamri, 2016:3). Musikhin (2016) put forth that the ESP teaching is predominantly directed to cultivate the learners' overall communicative competence useful for their professional development in the future, and at the same time to foster their language proficiency. In addition, many studies imply that the emphasis is more on oral communication skills (see-- Crosling and Ward, 2002; Kassim and Ali, 2010; Voyakina and Korolyova, 2014). However, it is not always the case. As in Thai Business world, the workplace makes use of written English than the spoken one more frequently (Hiranburana, 2017:37).

Business English teaching and learning

Business English is a part of English for specific purposes and focuses on vocabulary and topics used in the worlds of business, trade, finance, and international relations (Wikipedia). According to Haase (2013), Business English language learning is a learning of the written and spoken English language dealing with idiomatic expressions and a terminology, which is specifically as needs of the business world. Business English is an ESP employing English for business purposes in regard to business-related lexical, syntactic and grammatical features different from those of General English (Yanxin, 2015).

The demand and challenge on the Business English teaching and learning

Relevant to the trend of the change on business strategies and attitudes nowadays, there has been an emphasis on the use of English in the workplace (Hiranburana, 2017:31). It implies that English as a foreign language has been a medium of communication demanded for professional development and businesses to function well (Hiranburana, 2017). A study of the Business English teaching in China, even, has straightforwardly changed into Business

English as a Lingua Franca aiming at facilitating business communications among speakers of other languages, native English speakers, and non-native speakers (Yan Wu, 2013: 130). In dealing with the use of English in the workplace, English instruction is better directed to teaching and learning in context. In other words, Business English is provided in contextual setting (Felecan, 2017).

Guiyu and Yang (2016: 142) confirmed that the Business English curriculum nowadays is not really job-related as demanded by learners. Moreover, it is said that the curriculum should take into consideration the necessity of business-related courses in Business English. Similarly, the Business English materials provided to learners are directed to real-life situation and emphasized on communication.

Findings on Business English teaching and learning perspectives

A research by Kassim and Ali (2010:168) tapping the perspectives of engineers of 10 multinational chemical companies all around Malaysia show that ESP instruction should focus on oral, rather than written, communication skills entailing the communicative events of teleconferencing, networking for contacts and advice, and presenting new ideas and alternative strategies. The findings also imply that students' fluency in English has been a prospect to be more global professionals.

According to a study by Crosling and Ward (2002:41), however, formal presentation conducted during the students' schoolwork is inadequate as preparation for oral communication in the workplace. Moreover, most of the oral communication applied in the workplace is informal in nature and, thus it needs a different range of understandings and skills than those developed through formal presentation (Crosling and Ward, 2002).

On the other hand, a study conducted by the English Language Development in the Thai Automobile and Information Technology Industry reveals that employees at all levels

regard reading skills especially emails reading is essential (Hiranburana, 2017:37). For administrators, however, emails writing is more important. In addition, Hiranburana (2017) state that speaking and listening are seen as more important especially for cabin crew and banking staffs.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative design, more particularly a survey. Descriptive quantitative procedures are employed to reveal the most and the least typical responses of the respondents. All the data are tapped and informed as they are. The data are expected to reveal information about the students' and alumni's perspectives on the Business English course.

The subject of this study is, first, all the sophomores (the second- year students) who are still studying at the Business Administration Department, State Polytechnic of Malang. They are assigned in 7 classes of Diploma III Program and 7 classes of Diploma IV Program. The total number of classes is 14 classes in which each class consists of more or less 30 students. The cluster random sampling procedure is employed to take two class samples to represent the population or at least 60 students are the sample of the present study.

The respondents from the alumni are those who work for industry or company, or work for him/herself. The alumni are those who have graduated for the past five years. In this sense, the purposive random sampling procedure is operated.

The first instrument used in the present study is questionnaire. There are two sets of questionnaires. The first set of the questionnaire is for the sophomores and the other set is for the alumni. The problem items entail statements deploying 5 Likert-scale options, ranging from options of strongly agree, agree, moderately agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. There are also open-ended types of questions used to support and elicit the data of the students' willingness and view on the benefit of Business English course. One more

open-ended question taps their recommendation to the course.

The questionnaire for the students reveals information about their willingness and unwillingness in dealing with studying Business English course, the benefits they assume and their recommendation for the course. Some options are provided despite the possible free response availability in the problem items. The students are welcome to answer more than one response.

The questionnaire for the alumni comprises the information of how Business English is applied in the workplace, if the alumni gain benefit from their Business English course in their workplace, and the alumni's recommendation for the Business English course. There are three open-ended questions in the questionnaire. There is no option provided in each question. Thus, the respondents are free to respond based on what they feel and experience.

The data analysis deal with the answers of the respondents in the questionnaire. All responses in each question are listed and grouped. The similar responses are, then tabulated. From the tabulation, it is found the most and least typical responses to particular questions. The typical responses are presented in the form of percentage. It is, then, indicated the tendency of the respondents' perspectives towards the Business English Course in the Business Administration Department, State Polytechnic of Malang.

In the meantime, the other instrument as the source of data is documents entailing the syllabuses and materials of the Business English courses. The contents of the Business syllabuses and materials are examined per meeting for their relevance with the topics, language skills elements, and communication skills demanded by the students and alumni.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Despite the feeling of enjoyment to learn the subject, some students from both group samples claim the feeling of reluctance to read

or listen to any business topics for their own improvement.

As seen from the table, the majority of the students of 3A Office Administration Class D III program do not like reading English articles on business. Similarly, the students of 3A Marketing Class D IV program mostly feel no enjoyment when reading business articles in English.

There exists a contradictory fact. It seems unusual that the students contradictorily state that they can enjoy the Business English class yet at other time they do not enjoy reading the articles about the matters. Due to the present study's limitation of investigation, the fact behind the contradictory perspectives can be revealed clearly. A more detail investigation is required for the future research.

However, the existence of 34% students of Office Administration class and 37% students of Marketing class in the present study who feel no hesitance in reading business texts in English sound encouraging. It means that there are still hopes that those students are optimally taught to improve their proficiency.

Unlike when dealing with reading business text in English, the students from both groups seem to enjoy better in listening to the business news. Even the majority of the students from Office Administration class say they disagree and strongly disagree to feel reluctance in listening to the business news in English. In the meantime, the students of Marketing class share similarly between those who like and those who dislike. It is, however, a proof that more students like to have listening skill better than reading skill. In responding to such phenomena, the Business English instruction may give more portion on giving listening materials. It is not only to improve the students' listening comprehension skill but also to engage them to like the Business English courses.

In support to the students' enjoyment in learning Business English either at campus or outside campus, most students from both groups do not feel reluctant to study Business

English. Still, there are some students who need encouragement. Thus, the more stimulating materials and teaching method during the class interaction may become one of the solutions.

The students' motivation from both groups to study English for Business is, in fact, relatively good. Most students even have strong desire to do it. Based on the questionnaire, it is only found 2% out of 100% students who do not have strong feeling of motivation. Such facts are very encouraging, anyway.

Besides the students' own desire to study Business English, the role of the teachers' authority to take control on the students' willingness is vital. It is proven that about 75% students from both groups still consider that their motivation to study Business English is because of their teachers' order. Therefore, the internal motivation from the students' own willingness and the external motivation from the teachers' command are of a good combination for the students' engagement on the subject. Such motivation is a fine induction for the students to achieve proficiency in Business English.

Rivalry among friends to achieve better scores has not been the most motivation of the majority of the students. More than half of students in both class groups say disagree and strongly disagree if they study the subject because of the desire to compete with friends. Some students (about 38%-41%), however, still make rivalry as their motivation to gain better scores than their friends do. It is a good motivation, though.

The students also have positive perspectives on the willingness to learn more about Business English. The findings have proven that 96%-97% students are relatively enthusiastic to be more excellent in Business English. Only very few students have different perspectives. It is normal, though, that in teaching and learning situation there are students who are lowly motivated. However, such phenomena have become other energizing facts.

Moreover, the students' positive willingness in studying Business English is supported by the students' desire to own English dictionary about Business. It counts for 96% to 100% students for both classes. Many students are, even, highly encouraged to have one. It has become another positive motivation of the students.

Besides dictionary, most students (75% to 93%) claim that they want to subscribe English magazines or newspapers about business. If the students have such a desire, it indicates that their internal motivation is quite high. The students' high inner motivation makes the job of the teachers to encourage the students to study much easier. The duty of the teachers is then to modify more creative materials and teaching methods.

To support the students' positive motivation, they indeed have made some attempts. Their attempts are identified from their frequent activities supporting their motivation to learn the subject. Practices on using Business English have been tried by most students despite some students' low motivation in doing so as previously found in the present study.

The first attempt is the students' effort to read business articles or books in English as in magazines, newspapers, tabloids, and reference books. Around 67% to 74% students claim they frequently read those materials. If the students have attempted themselves, the intention to make them more proficient in reading English for business can be easily achieved.

Next, it is found that approximately 58% to 78% students also frequently listen to English news about business. The news is normally available on TV, radio, or other social media. However, the present study does not identify further about the sorts of social media the students usually listen to.

The students also seem to have their own initiative to search business texts in English themselves (around 83% to 89% students). Such an attempt has been a proof that they want to be more engaged in learning the subject.

An effort to practice communication is of an effective endeavor to acquire the target language. Around 96% to 97% students have claimed that they do such an attempt. They probably practice English communication either with their Indonesian or overseas friends.

The above-mentioned facts shown in the present study have proven that since the students' motivation is high, it can be influential to their effective learning in the subject. Their attempts to improve their Business English are undoubtedly effective. The skills and the media they use are practically applicable in their daily situation. The skills they practice are also required in their work later. The alumni have already signified quite similarly about the skills needed in the field. It is also in line with the study of Mahmoudy and Mahmoudy (2015)—see also chapter II saying that motivation is influential to the students' English learning.

The present study also proves that the students' motivation is in accordance with the interest in learning the subject. Then, the variety of media, ranging from printed media to electronic media and internet they explore surely show their high interest and motivation. It is similar to Bernard's study (2010) having conclusion that students' motivation about the language they are learning is associated with their interest in learning it.

All students definitely feel the benefits of studying Business English. Some typical benefits have been indicated by the students.

First of all, studying Business English is necessary for developing their understanding, knowledge and skills about business in English. Knowledge on business terms and expressions in English is of the point that many students have identified. Most students also clearly state that Business English course have enabled them to perform English skills necessary in business. Some skills to mention are particularly business presentation, business meeting, business socializing, business correspondence, business communication, and business negotiation.

The students, furthermore, think that those insight and skills will be of a necessity for their future work and career development, particularly when they apply or work for international companies. The more proficient they are in English, the more open the opportunity they get for their future career.

Understanding about global issues in business has become the concern of the students as the benefits of studying Business English. The students state that the course has prepared them to deal with global issues in business.

Some recommendations are addressed by the students for the better development of the teaching and learning program in the Department. Most students explicitly state that the more fascinating materials are to be constructed. More materials about global business and recent issues are encouraged in this sense.

The vocabulary enrichment and business communication practice are to be maintained and emphasized. It is intended to make the students more stimulated to use the language in business.

A conducive situation supporting the atmosphere of learning Business English is touched upon by the students as well. The students should be more urged to practice English in class. They are also encouraged to use it outside the class. The invited native speakers are expected by the students to support the atmosphere. It is to motivate them to be able to communicate in English.

The alumni contribute insights and inputs to the better Business English instruction in the Department. All the sample alumni take a lot of benefits from the courses during their college time. Most of them claim to apply the skills and knowledge they have learnt from the courses in their workplace. Some of them do not apply it, however, for their working environment does not wish them to do so.

Most of them also claim that their proficiency sufficiently supports their work. Few of them confess that their English competence is sufficient but it cannot be

intensively applied in their office. It is probably either due to the condition that their work does not really need their English or the materials they learn are not applicable in the company. However, there are alumni who use their English in high intensity since they work for multinational company. Luckily, their English is satisfactorily competent. One more point underlined by the alumni is that English is used for promoting and developing the career in the company.

All the phenomena found in the present study have been in line with Hiranburana's statement (2017) that the trend of business strategies and attitudes, nowadays has given emphasis on the use of English in the workplace. In addition, English has been a medium of communication for professional development and businesses to function well (Hiranburana, 2017).

The alumni have suggested that business communication skills in English should be more practiced. The skills to emphasize are those of business presentation and meeting, making business correspondence and report, and product selling. In addition, the usage of formal and informal language should be taught to the students so that they can apply the language based on the situation. It seems to be similar to a study by Crosling and Ward (2002) mentioning that formal presentation during the students' schoolwork is inadequate as preparation for oral communication in the workplace. Most of the oral communication applied in the workplace is informal in nature.

Vocabulary in business is to be given emphasized as well. Business English course as a part of ESP is supposed to touch on teaching the students with particular vocabulary used in the field.

As seen on the Business English syllabuses and materials, it is known that the courses are given in two semesters. In the third semester, the course is entitled as Business English 1. Meanwhile, in the fourth semester the course is labelled as Business English II.

In the third semester, the course still offers General English as a review of the previous courses in the first and second

semesters. The intended skills are of reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking and writing skills. The language elements cover the improvement of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, as well as other language mechanics. The general topics discussed are of such: Youth, Happiness, Relationship, Leadership, and Internet World. Those topics are presented for Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension, and Speaking Skills completed with the teaching and learning of vocabulary, pronunciation and other English mechanics. The grammar and writing skill particularly discuss Tenses, Active and Passive Voices, Sentence and Paragraph writing. The business English topics and competences are introduced, somehow. Among the topics are of job description, company logo, company history, tagline, CSR, preparing business meeting, business meeting layouts, event launching, and minutes taking. In the meantime, the business skills to practice are of business meeting and presentation.

In the fourth semester, the Business English course is more directed to task-based and project-based learning. The students are to establish an imaginary company and make a business plan within a group. From the beginning of the semester, the students have worked with their company group. Their company should handle several meetings, presentations, negotiating, socializing and launching. The topics are sequenced from company profile, product knowledge, market research, company advertising, company socializing and launching. The main project the students are to realize is company exhibition which is organized and conducted by them.

Considering the topics and skills intended in the courses, it is observed that some competencies and topics demanded by the students and alumni are already considered well despite the absence of the other skills and topics. The topics on global issues are not given emphasis. Besides, students seem to be not given enough skills in Business Correspondence and business report.

The presence of a native speaker can be encouraged to support the English

atmosphere. In the syllabuses and materials, it is noticed that all the business competencies are more in formal circumstance. The students are not familiarized with more non-formal situation where it is indeed more realistic and natural in the real field. The insertion of Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) context is not clearly seen from both the syllabuses and materials.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Nowadays, English has been widely used in business activity. Without doubt, everybody involves in business is demanded to acquire English. This situation is understood, though. Today everybody without exception has become a global community. The opportunity to interact with people all over the world has been more possible.

Business Administration Department, State Polytechnic of Malang has tried to respond to such a global challenge. The department has allotted Business English courses to complement its students with sufficient English competence applicable in the market.

Nevertheless, the curriculum of the Business English courses has not been re-evaluated. To re-evaluate, some important insights and inputs from the stakeholders are vital. Those considered as the stakeholders involve many parties. It can be those within the academic circle, namely the students, the education staffs, the administration staffs, the management, and so forth. It is also those who become the investors, partners, industry, government, and so on.

The present study has tried to collect information from the most involved party, that is, the students and the alumni. From them, it is found the most fundamental inputs. The students and alumni experience directly what is going on the field. The present study, then, investigate the perspectives of the students and alumni on the Business English course in the Department.

The findings indicate that the majority of the students are in favor of learning Business

English. All the students feel pleased to study the subject. Their motivation and interest in learning the subject are relatively positive and encouraging. Moreover, they feel that they benefit a lot from learning the subject. Thus, they indicate their favor and the feeling of benefit by making some essential endeavors.

Their motivation and interest are shown from their willingness to actively search for sources both written and spoken ones so as to improve their Business English proficiency. Some business readings from magazines, newspapers, reference books are eagerly explored. Some business news is also studied. There are, however, some other students in the sample indicates low motivation and interest in doing such a thing. Fortunately, the number of the lowly motivated and interested students is not really significant.

In the meantime, the students have put forth some important benefits of the Business English course. Studying the course surely is advantageous in a sense it provides them with business communication skills in English, like business presentation, business meeting, business socializing, business correspondence, business negotiation, and so forth. Business English course also help them to acquire business terms and expressions in English. Some issues on global business are also studied by them. In turn, all of those materials and skills are believed to be beneficial for them to get work or to develop their career in the future.

The students state some valuable recommendations for the improvement of the Business English courses in the Department. The materials should be fascinating and be in accordance with the current situation. International business issues are also recommended by the students. The teaching and learning atmosphere is supposed to be developed to stimulate the students to more practice the language. The existence of native speakers is encouraged to provide experiences for the students. The vocabulary enrichment, speaking ability or communication practices should also be focused. Out-door class is suggested by the students as well in order to make the situation different and refreshing,

The other findings are derived from the alumni who have already worked in various occupation and companies or institution. According to them, the Business English courses have benefitted them in a variety of level. Some of them involved in multinational companies intensively apply the skills and materials they have ever learnt during the college time. Some others do not apply them that much. Even, some alumni do not really require English since they do not deal much with international colleagues or clients.

However, some benefits have been identified. In accordance with what have been mentioned by the students, the alumni surely agree that business communication skills, like business presentation, business meeting, business socializing, and business correspondence are of an importance. To do so, business terms and expressions are essential to equip.

It is recommended by the alumni that more practices on business communication in English are emphasized along with the enrichment of business terms, expressions, and vocabulary. The usage of formal and informal language is supposed to be taught to the students so that they can mingle in any sorts of situation. The topics on global business issues are suggested as well. A point of forming the students' character building is issued, too.

Some of the competencies and topics in the syllabuses and materials have been included well. Nevertheless, Business Correspondence and report, and Cross-Cultural Understanding framework are still absent from the syllabuses and materials. The recent and global business issues are also insufficient. The presence of a native speaker can be encouraging someday to cover all the shortages.

The findings are firstly directed to the development of the existing curriculum of Business English courses. Even though the existing syllabus and course outline have been somehow in accordance with the students' and alumni perspectives, some absent points like topics on current global business issues, the character building relevant to business situation, and formal and informal usage of

language should be inserted. More students' practices are to be more emphasized. The topics and practices on business communication skills should be maintained and improved. Consequently, it reduces the talk of the teachers in front of the class. Thus, the duty of the teachers is definitely as facilitators, and motivators.

Secondly, the teachers should create an interesting English atmosphere that more stimulates all students to engage in the class interaction. Sometimes, however, different situation can be offered to students. Teaching and learning outdoor can be of a choice. It may refresh both the teachers and students in anyway.

For the future researchers, it is recommended to investigate more research problems to back up the present findings. For instance, the point of why a few students do not enjoy the course can be an opportunity to study further in the next investigation. It is also advised that the future similar researches trace the perspectives of the other stakeholders, like industry, college staffs and educators, community, and so forth.

The research methodology can also be the point to develop. The relationship between the students' interest and motivation and their Business English competences is possible to be explored.

Besides, the findings of the present study are intended to the management. Inviting native speakers is of a good idea to realize. Encouraging all college members to use English is expected to face the global world.

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