

Needs Analysis of English for the EIC Program in Preparing Students for Co-Operative Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the English language skill requirements for cooperative education from the perspectives of companies and EIC alumni graduates, and to examine the English and related skills needed to prepare EIC students for cooperative education placements. This research employed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected from 46 EIC students via an online questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed using grounded theory, employing open coding and frequency distributions to identify key themes related to skill needs. The findings indicated that companies and EIC alumni emphasized the importance of English-language skills for cooperative education. Among the four skills, reading was rated as the most important ($\bar{x} = 4.09$, $SD = 0.08$), while writing received the lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 4.00$, $SD = 0.05$). Despite variations in ranking, all English skills were considered essential for adequate preparation for cooperative education. The study concludes that English language skills are critical for enhancing students' readiness for cooperative education. The results suggest that the targeted development of English competencies should be integrated into the EIC curriculum to better prepare students and strengthen the EIC program at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Co-operative Education, Needs Analysis, EIC Program

INTRODUCTION

English has become a vital tool for global communication, education, employment, and travel. As a widely spoken international language, it serves as a medium for people of different nationalities to communicate effectively across borders in various contexts such as business, education, and tourism (Faridz Izza Rosadi, 2020). Although English is not the most widely spoken language in the world, it is recognized as an official language in 53 countries and is spoken by approximately 400 million people globally (Niyozova Aziza Ilyosovna, 2020). Furthermore, it is the most widely spoken second language in the world, used as a medium of instruction in universities, for international business meetings, and in global tourism. English proficiency, therefore, plays a key role in enabling individuals to pursue better career opportunities, expand professional networks, and engage in international collaboration (Erlangga Putra, 2020).

In Thailand, English language proficiency is increasingly important as the country integrates into the global economy. Employers across industries now expect graduates to possess not only technical knowledge but also strong English communication skills to succeed in multicultural workplaces. This is particularly crucial for students participating in Co-operative Education (Co-op Education), an educational model that systematically integrates academic study with real-world work experience.

According to Wichit Sirsa-arn (2012), Co-operative Education is a structured approach that alternates academic learning with practical work experience through partnerships between educational institutions and industrial enterprises. It provides students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in professional environments, develop essential soft skills, and strengthen their readiness to transition into the workforce. Similarly, Audrey Baron-Gutty et al. (2009) emphasized that Co-operative Education in Thailand bridges the gap between classroom learning and industry expectations by aligning academic curricula with workplace competencies.

Given that many companies now use English as the primary language for internal and external communication, students must acquire English language competence and related communication skills before entering Co-operative Education programs. Enhancing English proficiency not only increases students' employability but also improves their ability to engage confidently in professional tasks, teamwork, and intercultural collaboration.

Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the needs, skills, and knowledge in English required for Co-operative Education among companies and alumni of the English for International Communication (EIC) program at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak Campus. The findings serve as a foundation for improving the EIC curriculum and preparing students more effectively for Co-operative Education experiences.

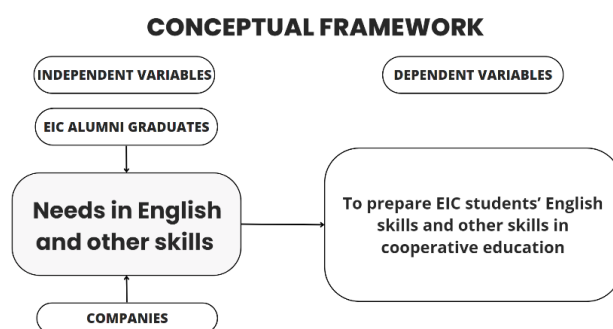
Despite the recognized importance of English proficiency in the modern workplace, there remains a significant gap between Thai students' English language competencies and employers' expectations. Previous studies (Sudarat Kaewkunha, 2021; Edgar R. Eslit, 2023) have explored English language needs in general professional contexts, but limited research has focused specifically on the EIC program and its role in preparing students for Co-operative Education.

While Co-operative Education aims to combine theoretical learning with practical experience, there is insufficient empirical evidence to identify which English skills, listening, speaking, reading, or writing, are most essential for students in workplace settings. Moreover, there is limited research on the specific knowledge, communicative competence, and other soft skills that EIC students must develop to perform effectively during their Co-op placements.

This research, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by analyzing both company expectations and EIC alumni experiences to determine the precise English skills and supporting competencies necessary for successful participation in Co-operative Education. The study provides new insights to guide curriculum enhancement and align EIC program outcomes with real-world labor market demands.

Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze the English language skills and related competencies required for Co-operative Education in order to enhance EIC students' readiness for effective workplace integration.



Research Questions

1. What English language skills are required for EIC students to participate in Co-operative Education effectively?
2. What related competencies, in addition to English language skills, are necessary to enhance EIC students' readiness for workplace integration?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is a systematic process for identifying gaps between existing and desired skills or performance levels to inform the development of practical training or educational programs. Bleich (2018) defines it as the

process of evaluating a team's or an individual's skills to determine training requirements, while Morrison (2020) views it as an essential step in improving organizational productivity and efficiency. Similarly, Monday Blog (2022) describes needs analysis as a structured, data-driven process for identifying "gaps" between current and expected performance, emphasizing the importance of aligning skills with organizational goals.

According to Training Industry (2020), needs analysis, also referred to as "needs assessment" or "gap analysis", is a formal and systematic evaluation process aimed at determining what training should be undertaken to enhance performance. Berkeley Lab Training (2022) expands on this by noting that needs analysis not only detects performance deficiencies but also investigates their causes and proposes appropriate solutions. Brindley (1984) further explains that the term "needs" encompasses not only deficiencies but also learners' wants, motivations, and expectations, making it a multidimensional construct that guides curriculum design.

Needs analysis in the workplace ensures that employee development aligns with both individual and organizational objectives. Mager and Pipe (1984) proposed a three-step model for workplace needs analysis: identifying desired performance, assessing current performance, and determining performance gaps requiring intervention. Swanson and Holton (2001) emphasize the importance of aligning these findings with the organization's strategic goals to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of training. Kathpalia (2021) asserts that training needs analysis plays a vital role in forecasting future skill requirements and ensuring workforce readiness.

Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) highlight that practical needs analysis should consider motivational and environmental factors in addition to technical knowledge. In this sense, workplace needs analysis is not merely about identifying training content but also about ensuring a supportive learning context. It serves as a strategic management process that enhances employees' competencies and strengthens organizational competitiveness through targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Needs analysis is the foundation of effective curriculum and training design. Wengroff (2021) notes that organizations must conduct population-level assessments to identify performance deficiencies and design appropriate interventions. In language education, Kayi (2008) emphasizes that needs analysis informs the development of learning goals and curriculum content, while Nation and Macalister (2010) view it as essential for determining what learners already know and what they still need to learn.

Ali and Salih (2013) argue that needs analysis is crucial for creating syllabi and instructional materials that are responsive to learners' professional contexts. Similarly, Sulistyani (2018) explains that it helps educators identify the specific language skills required for students pursuing careers in nursing, tourism, or business. Haque (2014) and Siwayingsuwan (2015) highlight that needs analysis also enables teachers to adapt teaching strategies, materials, and methods to align with learners' goals, thereby enhancing learners' motivation and overall learning outcomes.

In summary, needs analysis is indispensable for aligning educational programs with real-world requirements and ensuring that training interventions meet both learner and institutional expectations.

English Language in the Workplace

English proficiency has become one of the most essential employability skills in the modern workforce. Richards (2010) suggests that in fields such as tourism and hospitality, learners' language needs can be determined through an analysis of actual job tasks. Durga (2018) notes that employers require employees with strong written and verbal communication skills, as English serves as the common language in multicultural organizations. Cullen (2016) confirms that English is the language of international business, with approximately 85% of multinational corporations using it as a working language. Gholkar (2022) found that English proficiency enhances career progression and salary growth, as employers value it for global communication and cross-border collaboration. Similarly, Maltalingua (n.d.) emphasizes that companies with international operations consider English a critical skill that facilitates smoother coordination among diverse teams. Thus, English proficiency is not just an academic asset but a professional necessity that significantly improves employability and workplace integration.

English has become the lingua franca of global communication and business. Kim (2021) and Nickerson (2005) argue that English is now central to workplace interactions, particularly in meetings, negotiations, and email communication. Lutz (2014) observed that enhancing employees' English proficiency strengthens a company's competitive advantage, as seen in organizations such as RUAG that conduct regular English assessments. The British Council (n.d.) reports that multinational firms such as Heineken, Samsung, and Renault anticipate that more than half of their future workforce will require English proficiency to perform effectively. Overall, English proficiency contributes not only to individual employability but also to national economic development and global connectivity.

Co-Operative Education

Co-operative Education (Co-op) integrates academic learning with professional work experience to prepare students for employment. Kent State University (n.d.) defines it as an academic program that provides students with practical work experience related to their field of study while pursuing their degree. Similarly, the Canadian

Association for Cooperative Education (CAFCE, 2005) describes it as a structured partnership between higher education institutions and employers. Groenewald (2004) highlights their emphasis on developing practical competencies through collaboration between education and industry. The Co-operative Education Handbook of Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya (2019) identifies Co-op as an essential strategy for enhancing graduate quality by aligning academic and professional standards. Munkner and Shah (1993) and Knowles (1985) further argue that Co-operative Education fosters self-development, critical thinking, and an understanding of professional ethics, thereby equipping learners for lifelong employability. At the undergraduate level, Jones (2007) and Katula and Threnhauser (1999) describe Co-op as an “expanded classroom” in which students apply theory to practice. Kerka (1999) notes that Co-op experiences enhance students’ motivation, career clarity, and vocational maturity. Therefore, Co-operative Education represents an essential pedagogical bridge between higher education and the labor market.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine English-language needs for Co-operative Education (Co-op). Data were collected during September–October 2023 from 46 participants selected via purposive sampling: 22 EIC alumni (Department of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Business Administration and Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak) and 24 companies that hosted or could host EIC Co-op students. Purposive sampling was used to access respondents with direct, relevant experience to address the research questions.

Instruments. A bilingual (Thai–English) online questionnaire adapted from the English Language Competence Questionnaire (Eslit, 2023) and Needs Analysis of the English Language for Thai Employees in the Service Industry (Kaewkunha, 2021) measured the perceived importance of skills on a 5-point Likert scale and included three open-ended items. An in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol elicited qualitative insights from a subsample.

Validity and reliability. Content validity was established by three English instructors using Item–Objective Congruence (IOC); IOC values ranged from 0.67 to 1.00, with an average of 0.98 (acceptable ≥ 0.50). A pilot with five EIC alumni and five English teachers produced Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.966$ (29 items), indicating excellent internal consistency.

Procedures. Following expert review and piloting, the questionnaire (Google Form) and interview protocol were administered to all participants. Interviews were conducted with five alumni (22.73%) and five companies (20.83%); interviews were recorded in Thai and translated into English.

Data analysis. Quantitative data (questionnaire) were analyzed using SPSS v29 and Microsoft Excel to compute means ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviations (SD) for each item. Mean interpretations were guided by established descriptive criteria (Moidunny, 2009). Qualitative data (open-ended responses and interviews) were analyzed using grounded theory open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1988) with color-coded categories; results were summarized with frequency distributions (f) and percentages (%) to identify salient needs and to triangulate with quantitative findings. Results are synthesized in the subsequent chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study on the English language and related skills required for EIC students’ preparation for Co-operative Education. The findings are organized according to the research questions and are based on analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data.

English Language Skills Required for Co-operative Education

To address Research Question 1 on the English language skills required for Co-operative Education, descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to assess the perceived importance.

The results indicate that the overall need for English skills is high ($\bar{x} = 4.01$, $SD = 0.08$). Among the four skills, reading was rated as the most important, followed closely by listening, speaking, and writing. All skills were perceived as highly necessary for effective participation in Co-operative Education. Table 1 presents the summary of English language skill needs.

Table 1. Needs of English Language Skills for the EIC Program in Preparing Students for Co-operative Education

English Skill	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Level of Importance
Listening	4.06	0.11	High
Speaking	4.02	0.09	High
Reading	4.09	0.08	High
Writing	4.00	0.05	High
Overall	4.01	0.08	High

These findings suggest that EIC students must be competent across all four English skills, with particular emphasis on reading comprehension and oral communication to meet workplace demands.

Importance of English for Co-operative Education

Further analysis examined respondents' views on the importance of English for Co-operative Education. Both EIC alumni and company representatives emphasized the importance of English for communication with international customers, particularly in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, aviation, and international business.

As shown in Table 2, business communication with foreign customers was the most frequently cited reason, followed by its importance for specific job roles and increased employment opportunities.

Table 2. Importance of English for Co-operative Education

Importance of English	EIC Alumni (f)	%	Companies (f)	%
Business communication with foreign customers	6	33.33	9	47.37
Required in specific sectors (hotels, airlines, international firms)	6	33.33	2	10.53
Increased employment opportunities	3	16.67	2	10.53
Writing emails and documents	2	11.11	1	5.26
Building self-confidence	1	5.56	1	5.26
Other reasons	—	—	4	21.05
Total	18	100	19	100

These results indicate that English is perceived not only as a communication tool but also as a factor contributing to employability, professionalism, and organizational image.

Priority English Skills for Workplace Performance

Respondents were also asked to identify which English skills are most needed during Co-operative Education. The findings, presented in Table 3, show that speaking skills were ranked as the most important by both alumni and companies, followed by listening, writing, and reading.

Table 3. English Skills Needed for Co-operative Education

English Skill	EIC Alumni (f)	%	Companies (f)	%
Speaking	17	36.96	15	34.10
Listening	10	21.74	11	25.00
Writing	10	21.74	10	22.73
Reading	9	19.57	8	18.18
Total	46	100	44	100

This highlights the importance of oral communication skills for real-time workplace interactions, particularly in customer-facing roles.

Other Skills Required Beyond English

To answer Research Question 2, qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to identify other essential skills for Co-operative Education. Both alumni and employers emphasized communication skills, digital literacy, teamwork, and professional attitudes. As shown in Table 4, communication skills ranked highest among both groups, followed by digital skills such as proficiency in Microsoft Office and Canva. Companies placed greater emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, while alumni highlighted responsibility and background knowledge.

Table 4. Other Skills Required for Co-operative Education

Other Skills	EIC Alumni (f)	%	Companies (f)	%
Communication	8	21.05	11	21.16
Digital/Office programs	7	18.42	6	11.54
Background knowledge	5	13.16	3	5.77

Critical thinking	4	10.53	2	3.85
Responsibility	3	7.89	3	5.77
Collaboration/Teamwork	1	2.63	7	13.46
Other soft skills	10	26.32	20	38.31
Total	38	100	52	100

Overall, the findings demonstrate that successful preparation for Co-operative Education requires a combination of strong English proficiency, soft skills, digital competencies, and professional attitudes that reflect authentic workplace expectations.

DISCUSSION

Discussion in Relation to Research Question 1: English Language Skills Required for Co-operative Education

In response to Research Question 1, the findings indicate that English language proficiency is perceived as highly important for EIC students preparing for Co-operative Education. Quantitative results indicate that all four English skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were rated as highly important. Among these, reading skill had the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 4.09$), suggesting that the ability to comprehend workplace written materials, such as manuals, reports, emails, and technical documents, is essential for effective job performance. This supports Gray's (1924) assertion that reading expands professional understanding and enhances work-related competence.

However, qualitative evidence from open-ended responses and interviews revealed a complementary yet distinct emphasis: speaking skills emerged as the most critical English competency in practical workplace contexts. Both EIC alumni and company representatives highlighted the importance of oral communication in daily interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and customers. This finding aligns with Clement and Murugavel (2018), who identified English-speaking proficiency as a key employability skill due to its role in meetings, presentations, and problem-solving. Taken together, these results suggest a functional distinction between skills: reading facilitates comprehension of written information, whereas speaking enables real-time communication and workplace integration.

These findings imply that the EIC curriculum should adopt a balanced approach to English instruction, integrating speaking and listening activities for communicative competence alongside reading and writing tasks for professional documentation. Experiential learning strategies, such as role-plays, simulations, and workplace-based communication projects, may help bridge academic learning and real-world application.

Discussion in Relation to Research Question 2: Other Skills Required for Co-Operative Education

Addressing Research Question 2, the study found that, in addition to English proficiency, a wide range of non-linguistic skills are essential for successful participation in Co-operative Education. Both EIC alumni and company representatives consistently identified communication, collaboration, and digital proficiency as key competencies. Communication skills were ranked highest by both groups, reinforcing their central role in teamwork, coordination, and professional interaction. This supports Kapur's (2020) view that effective communication underpins workplace efficiency and organizational success.

Differences in emphasis between stakeholder groups were also evident. Alumni placed greater importance on technical and digital skills, such as proficiency in Microsoft Office and Canva, reflecting their direct experiences with employability and task performance in technology-driven environments. In contrast, companies emphasized collaboration and teamwork, underscoring the need for interpersonal competence and collective responsibility in organizational settings. These findings are consistent with Shelbourn et al. (2007), who highlighted collaboration as a critical factor in achieving organizational goals, and with Rubin and Abrams (2015), who emphasized digital literacy as a prerequisite for modern workplace readiness.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that all four English skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, were perceived as highly important for students preparing for cooperative education. Among them, reading skill was rated highest in the quantitative analysis ($\bar{x} = 4.09$), as it is crucial for understanding manuals, instructions, emails, and work-related documents. Conversely, the qualitative results emphasized speaking skills as the most critical ability (32.98%), since it directly influences daily workplace communication, customer interaction, and teamwork. These findings suggest that while reading facilitates comprehension, speaking enables active participation and communication in

professional contexts. Therefore, both skills should be developed simultaneously to achieve well-rounded English proficiency suitable for cooperative education and employment.

In addition to English-language proficiency, both EIC alumni and companies identified 19 other skills essential for workplace success. The most frequently mentioned were communication skills, collaboration skills, and proficiency in various specific programs (e.g., Microsoft Office, Canva, data analysis tools). These competencies are vital for effective teamwork, adaptability, and digital literacy in today's fast-changing work environment. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of responsibility, discipline, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, which reflect the behavioral and cognitive attributes required in professional life.

Based on these findings, the study suggests that the English for International Communication (EIC) Program at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak should continue to emphasize English language development while expanding its focus to include soft skills and digital competencies. The program could incorporate the following strategies:

1. **Curriculum Integration:** Combine English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with project-based learning that mirrors workplace tasks, such as report writing, email correspondence, and oral presentations.
2. **Skill-Based Workshops:** Conduct communication and collaboration workshops to strengthen students' confidence and teamwork abilities.
3. **Digital Literacy Training:** Provide courses or short modules on essential software, data management, and online communication platforms.
4. **Industry Partnerships:** Collaborate with local and international companies to align learning outcomes with actual professional requirements.
5. **Assessment Innovation:** Evaluate students' performance not only on linguistic proficiency but also on problem-solving, responsibility, and interpersonal skills.

Such initiatives would ensure that EIC graduates are not only linguistically capable but also technologically proficient and professionally adaptable—qualities essential for success in today's global labor market.

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