Research Article

ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEEDS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD ISLAMIC EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study examines the English language needs of students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program (PIAUD) at UIN Alauddin Makassar, who will teach in kindergartens and Raudhatul Athfal where English is increasingly introduced to young children. A quantitative descriptive design was used. A 48-item Likert-scale questionnaire covering necessities, lacks, wants and the learning environment was completed online by 33 students from the 2023 batch, and the responses were analysed using frequencies, the percentage of agreement, medians and means. Students held positive attitudes towards English: 63.6% enjoyed learning it and considered it important, and 60.6% agreed that they need English to read academic texts. The clearest needs concerned productive skills: around two-thirds reported difficulty speaking fluently in academic or professional contexts (69.7%), understanding native speakers (66.7%) and writing reports or academic papers (60.6%), and 69.7% wanted to improve their grammar and vocabulary. Students preferred simulations, real examples, interactive teaching and hands-on practice. Their self-assessment of proficiency and their views on professional communication were, however, largely neutral. The findings suggest that English instruction for PIAUD students should take an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach that develops speaking and writing through practical tasks related to early childhood education. Because the data come from 33 self-selected students in one program and rely on self-report, they should be complemented by an analysis of the target situation of early childhood teachers.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Islamic Education; English for Specific Purposes; English Learning Needs; Needs Analysis*

Article History:
Submitted : 18 May 2025
Revised : 18 June 2025
Accepted : 19 July 2025
Published : 31 August 2025

How to cite this article:
Sulfani, A., Sahlia, N. A., & Jannah, N. M. (2025). English language needs of early childhood Islamic education students. *ELSTIC-IJ: English Language, Linguistics, and Culture International Journal, 5*(02), https://doi.org/10.24252/elstic-ij.v5i02.73704

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INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential skill in higher education, particularly in academic and professional contexts where students are expected to access global knowledge, communicate effectively, and prepare themselves for future careers (Crystal, 2003). As a

result, university students from various disciplines are required to develop English proficiency that is relevant to their specific fields of study.

For students of the Early Childhood Islamic Education department, English plays an increasingly important role. As prospective early childhood educators, Early Childhood Islamic Education departmen students are expected to engage with diverse academic resources, teaching materials, and professional information, many of which are available in English. In addition, the rapid development of educational practices and the availability of international training programs and learning platforms require future educators to possess adequate English skills. Therefore, English learning for early childhood Islamic education students should not be general in nature but tailored to their academic and professional needs.

The Indonesian context makes these needs more pressing. Indonesia has one of the largest populations of young learners of English in the world, and English at the elementary level has undergone major policy changes in recent years (Zein, 2017). The government has announced that English will become a compulsory subject in primary schools from Grade 3 starting in 2027 (Radio Republik Indonesia, 2026), and many kindergartens and Raudhatul Athfal already introduce English to young children. Research on kindergartens shows, however, that teachers who introduce English often have limited English proficiency and little training in teaching very young learners, rely heavily on the first language, and lack clear curriculum guidance (Budianto, 2026; Rahayu & Noor Rohmah, 2025). Similar challenges in teaching English to young learners have been reported internationally (Copland et al., 2014). Future Early Childhood Islamic Education department graduates may therefore be expected to use simple classroom English with children, communicate with parents, and select and adapt English learning materials, in addition to using English for their own studies.

This condition highlights the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in higher education. ESP focuses on designing and delivering English instruction that meets the specific needs of learners based on their field of study or profession (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Unlike General English, ESP emphasizes relevance, practicality, and usefulness in real academic or professional situations. In this context, understanding what learners need, what they lack, and what they expect from an English course becomes a crucial step in developing effective instruction.

Needs analysis is considered a fundamental component of ESP. It serves as a systematic process to identify learners' goals, motivations, learning preferences, current proficiency levels, and challenges in learning a language (Brown, 2016). Through needs analysis, lecturers and curriculum designers can align learning objectives, materials, teaching

strategies, and assessment with students' actual conditions. Richards (2001) emphasizes that needs analysis helps ensure that language programs are meaningful and responsive to learners rather than relying on assumptions or standardized content that may not fit all contexts.

In the context of Early Childhood Islamic Education departmen students, needs analysis is particularly important due to the diversity of learners' backgrounds and future professional demands. Early Childhood Islamic Education departmenstudents may require English for various purposes, such as understanding early childhood education theories, accessing teaching resources, preparing academic assignments, or participating in professional development activities. Furthermore, their English learning needs may be influenced by internal factors such as motivation, confidence, and prior learning experiences, as well as external factors such as classroom environment, learning facilities, and exposure to English outside the classroom, which play a crucial role in shaping language learning outcomes (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

Needs analyses in Indonesian higher education have mostly examined students of health-related programs, such as public health (Arroyyani et al., 2022), midwifery (Hariyanto et al., 2022) and medicine, midwifery and pharmacy (Hidayati & Meisani, 2023). Much less is known about students who are preparing to teach young children. Recognizing this gap, this study conducts a needs analysis of English learning forEarly Childhood Islamic Education departmen students at UIN Alauddin Makassar. To obtain a comprehensive understanding, it examines multiple aspects of learners' needs, including professional information, personal background, English proficiency, learners' lacks, learning preferences, professional communication needs, expectations of the ESP course, and environmental support. The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Early Childhood Islamic Education departmen students perceive the importance of English for their academic and professional needs?

RQ2. What are the students' self-assessed English proficiency and their main lacks?

RQ3. What learning methods, course content and learning conditions do the students prefer and experience?

The study was conducted in the context of English for early child course taken by Early Childhood Islamic Education department students . ESP approaches are increasingly used in Islamic early childhood education to develop children's problem solving and creativity through activities such as building structures and combining art with mathematics (Nadlifah & Latif, 2024). An English for for Early Childhood Islamic Education departmenstudents could therefore include the language of simple science and mathematics

activities for young children. The questionnaire, however, addressed students' general and professional English needs rather than English-specific needs, so the implications for the English course are discussed in the discussion. By understanding students' needs more clearly, lecturers can design learning materials and activities that are more relevant, engaging, and supportive of students' future roles as educators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Needs Analysis in English for Specific Purposes

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguish target needs, what learners need to do in the target situation, from learning needs, what learners need to do in order to learn. Target needs are commonly analysed as necessities, the demands of the target situation; lacks, the gap between learners' current proficiency and these demands; and wants, what learners themselves feel they need. Basturkmen (2010) adds that needs analysis should combine objective information about learners and the target situation with learners' subjective perceptions and preferences, while Nation and Macalister (2010) place needs analysis alongside environment analysis, which examines factors such as time, facilities and learning conditions that constrain course design. These distinctions frame the eight sections of the questionnaire used in this study.

English in Early Childhood Education

Teaching English to young learners differs from teaching adults. Copland et al. (2014) found that teachers of young learners in five countries faced similar challenges, including large classes, limited proficiency, difficulties in teaching speaking and grammar, and tensions between policy and classroom realities. In Indonesia, elementary English education has shifted between compulsory, optional and local-content status (Zein, 2017), and kindergarten teachers who introduce English report limited training, uneven proficiency, reliance on the first language and unclear curriculum guidance (Budianto, 2026). Kindergarten teachers value early English for children's communication and later learning but feel insufficiently prepared to teach it, and they improvise with songs, movement, pictures and online resources (Rahayu & Noor Rohmah, 2025). These studies suggest that prospective early childhood teachers need both personal English proficiency and the ability to use simple, child-appropriate classroom English.

Previous Needs Analyses in Indonesian Higher Education

Needs analyses of Indonesian university students in other fields provide points of comparison. Public health students regarded writing as the most important skill and reported low confidence in grammar (Arroyyani et al., 2022). Midwifery students considered English very useful and wanted English teaching to emphasise speaking and communication with patients (Hariyanto et al., 2022), and a survey of 300 medical, midwifery and pharmacy students showed that they needed English to participate in and understand professional discourse (Hidayati & Meisani, 2023). No comparable study of early childhood education students was found, which this study seeks to address.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design aimed at identifying and describing the English language learning needs of students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. A quantitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on collecting numerical data from respondents and presenting it in the form of frequencies, percentages, and averages to portray students' needs objectively. This design allows researchers to map learners' needs without manipulating variables, making it suitable for needs analysis research within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Participants

The participants of this study were 33 undergraduate students from the Early Childhood Islamic Education Department of UIN Alauddin Makassar, all from the 2023 batch but from different classes. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they were actively enrolled in an English-related course and were considered relevant to the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that the respondents had sufficient experience with English learning in higher education and could provide meaningful responses related to ESP needs. The questionnaire link was distributed to Early Childhood Islamic Education department students of the batch, and 33 completed it. Because participation was voluntary, students who were more interested in English may have been more likely to respond, which is considered in interpreting the results.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of 48 items, adapted from ESP and needs analysis frameworks. The items were organized into eight categories: professional information (5 items), personal background information (10 items), English language proficiency (6 items), learners' lacks (5 items), language learning preferences (7 items), professional communication needs (5 items), expectations from the ESP course (5 items), and environmental and learning situation factors (5 items). All items were statements rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire was administered in through Google Forms. Internal consistency for each section was report Cronbach's alpha per section. Four pairs of items addressed similar content (items 5 and 37, 9 and 39, 12 and 27, and 13 and 25) and are used in this article as an informal check on response consistency. All items were worded so that agreement indicates a need, a lack or a positive perception.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Responses were tabulated into frequencies and percentages for each item. Because Likert responses are ordinal, the percentage of agreement (agree and strongly agree combined) and the median were used as the main indicators, and means are reported for comparison. An item was treated as a clearly expressed need when at least half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed and the median was 4.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Professional information

Table 1 shows students' perceptions of the role of English in their studies and future work.

Table 1. Professional information

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
1	I often use English in my studies or work.	3.0	24.2	57.6	15.2	0.0	15.2	3	2.85
2	I need English to read and understand professional or academic texts.	3.0	6.1	30.3	48.5	12.1	60.6	4	3.61

3	I need English to write reports, papers, or official correspondence.	6.1	9.1	54.5	30.3	0.0	30.3	3	3.09
4	I will use English regularly in my future profession.	0.0	6.1	54.5	27.3	12.1	39.4	3	3.45
5	The English I need must include technical vocabulary or vocabulary specific to my field.	0.0	0.0	57.6	39.4	3.0	42.4	3	3.45

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

The intensity of English use in students' daily activities is still relatively low: 57.6% gave a neutral response to the statement that they often use English in their studies or work, 27.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and only 15.2% agreed. In contrast, students showed clear awareness of the importance of English literacy: 60.6% agreed or strongly agreed that they need English to read and understand professional or academic texts. Views on formal writing and future use were more moderate. Most students were neutral, but 30.3% agreed that they need English to write reports, papers or official letters, and 39.4% agreed or strongly agreed that they will use English regularly in their future profession. No student disagreed that the English they need must include vocabulary specific to their field, and 42.4% agreed or strongly agreed.

Personal background information

Table 2 presents students' learning experiences, attitudes and motivation.

Table 2. Personal background information

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
6	I have had positive experiences learning English before.	0.0	9.1	42.4	42.4	6.1	48.5	3	3.45
7	My cultural background influences the way I learn English.	0.0	24.2	57.6	18.2	0.0	18.2	3	2.94
8	I am taking this course to improve my English skills in my field of study or work.	0.0	3.0	51.5	42.4	3.0	45.5	3	3.45
9	I hope this course will help me communicate better in my field.	0.0	3.0	42.4	48.5	6.1	54.5	4	3.58
10	I enjoy learning English and consider it important.	0.0	0.0	36.4	54.5	9.1	63.6	4	3.73
11	I feel confident when using English.	3.0	15.2	57.6	24.2	0.0	24.2	3	3.03

12	I prefer to learn through discussion or group work.	0.0	3.0	54.5	33.3	9.1	42.4	3	3.48
13	I often find it difficult to understand English grammar.	0.0	3.0	42.4	48.5	6.1	54.5	4	3.58
14	I want to learn more about English speakers.	0.0	0.0	39.4	51.5	9.1	60.6	4	3.70
15	I am motivated to master English for my future.	0.0	0.0	45.5	39.4	15.2	54.5	4	3.70

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

Students' attitudes towards English were positive. 63.6% agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy learning English and consider it important, 60.6% wanted to learn more about English speakers, and 54.5% were motivated to master English for their future; none disagreed with these statements. 48.5% had had positive experiences of learning English, and 45.5% were taking the course to improve their English in their field. Most students (57.6%) did not see their cultural background as influencing the way they learn English. Confidence, however, was limited: only 24.2% felt confident when using English, while 57.6% were neutral and 18.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 54.5% often found English grammar difficult to understand.

English language proficiency

Table 3 shows students' self-assessment of their English skills.

Table 3. Self-assessed English language proficiency

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
16	My speaking skills are good enough for everyday conversation.	0.0	21.2	66.7	12.1	0.0	12.1	3	2.91
17	I can understand lectures, presentations, or conversations in English.	0.0	21.2	63.6	15.2	0.0	15.2	3	2.94
18	I am able to read and understand academic or professional texts in English.	0.0	24.2	54.5	21.2	0.0	21.2	3	2.97
19	I am able to write reports, essays, or formal emails in English.	0.0	36.4	42.4	21.2	0.0	21.2	3	2.85
20	I have sufficient vocabulary in my field of study or work.	0.0	24.2	51.5	24.2	0.0	24.2	3	3.00
21	My English pronunciation is quite clear and easy to understand.	0.0	21.2	60.6	18.2	0.0	18.2	3	2.97

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

Students were uncertain about their English proficiency: most responses to every proficiency item were neutral, and all six item means were close to or below the scale midpoint. Only 12.1% considered their speaking skills good enough for everyday conversation, and 15.2% felt able to understand lectures, presentations or conversations in English. Writing was the weakest skill: 36.4% disagreed that they were able to write reports, essays or formal emails, and only 21.2% agreed. Perceptions of field-specific vocabulary were evenly divided, with 24.2% agreeing and 24.2% disagreeing that their vocabulary was sufficient, and 60.6% were neutral about the clarity of their pronunciation.

Learners' lacks

Table 4 presents the difficulties students reported.

Table 4. Learners' lacks

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
22	I have difficulty speaking English fluently in academic or professional contexts.	0.0	3.0	27.3	66.7	3.0	69.7	4	3.70
23	I have difficulty understanding native English speakers.	0.0	3.0	30.3	60.6	6.1	66.7	4	3.70
24	My writing skills are not yet sufficient to produce reports or academic papers.	3.0	0.0	36.4	60.6	0.0	60.6	4	3.55
25	I need to improve my grammar and vocabulary to support my studies/work.	0.0	0.0	30.3	63.6	6.1	69.7	4	3.76
26	There is a significant gap between my current English language skills and those required in my field.	0.0	9.1	36.4	54.5	0.0	54.5	4	3.45

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

The lacks section produced the highest levels of agreement in the questionnaire. 69.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they had difficulty speaking English fluently in academic or professional contexts, 66.7% had difficulty understanding native English speakers, and 60.6% considered their writing skills insufficient for reports or academic papers. 69.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they needed to improve their grammar and vocabulary, with no student disagreeing, and 54.5% perceived a significant gap between their current

English skills and those required in their field. These results are consistent with the self-assessment in Table 3 and confirm that productive skills, particularly speaking and writing for formal purposes, are the students' main weakness. The contrast with Table 3 should be interpreted with care, however: students were mostly neutral when asked to rate their own skills, but most agreed with statements describing difficulties. Because all lacks items were worded so that agreement indicates a difficulty, part of this agreement may reflect a tendency to agree with statements rather than a precise judgement of each skill.

Language learning preferences

Table 5 shows students' preferred learning methods and habits.

Table 5. Language learning preferences

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
27	I learn better through discussion and group work.	3.0	6.1	48.5	42.4	0.0	42.4	3	3.30
28	I prefer to learn through real activities and simulations.	3.0	3.0	36.4	51.5	6.1	57.6	4	3.55
29	I often use videos, apps, or the internet to learn English.	3.0	15.2	45.5	33.3	3.0	36.4	3	3.18
30	I often review my English lessons outside of class.	3.0	9.1	57.6	27.3	3.0	30.3	3	3.18
31	I hope lecturers use interactive teaching methods.	0.0	3.0	45.5	45.5	6.1	51.5	4	3.55
32	I understand better when the lecturer gives real examples.	3.0	3.0	39.4	48.5	6.1	54.5	4	3.52
33	I am happy when learning activities involve hands-on practice.	3.0	3.0	42.4	48.5	3.0	51.5	4	3.45

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

Students preferred active and practical learning. 57.6% agreed or strongly agreed that they prefer to learn through real activities and simulations, 54.5% understood better when the lecturer gave real examples, 51.5% hoped lecturers would use interactive teaching methods, and 51.5% enjoyed hands-on practice. Collaborative learning was viewed somewhat less favourably, with 42.4% agreeing that they learn better through discussion and group work. Independent learning habits were limited: 36.4% often used videos, apps or the internet to learn English, and only 30.3% often reviewed their English lessons outside class.

Professional communication needs

Table 6 presents students' needs for communication in their future profession.

Table 6. Professional communication needs

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
34	I need to learn how to communicate professionally in my field.	0.0	3.0	54.5	39.4	3.0	42.4	3	3.42
35	I need to understand how to write reports or formal documents in English.	0.0	9.1	39.4	48.5	3.0	51.5	4	3.45
36	I need to use polite and formal English when speaking with my boss or clients.	0.0	9.1	42.4	48.5	0.0	48.5	3	3.39
37	I need to master the technical terms used in my field.	0.0	3.0	57.6	39.4	0.0	39.4	3	3.36
38	I need to understand how professionals in my field interact using English.	0.0	6.1	48.5	45.5	0.0	45.5	3	3.39

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

About half of the students recognised specific professional communication needs. 51.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they need to understand how to write reports or formal documents in English, 48.5% that they need to use polite and formal English with superiors or clients, and 45.5% that they need to understand how professionals in their field interact in English. Fewer students agreed that they need to learn to communicate professionally in their field (42.4%) or to master technical terms (39.4%), and most were neutral on these items, which may indicate that students have not yet been widely exposed to the specific language of PIAUD professional practice.

Expectations from the ESP course

Table 7 shows students' expectations of the ESP course

Table 7. Expectations from the ESP course

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
39	I hope this course will help me communicate effectively in my field.	0.0	0.0	42.4	51.5	6.1	57.6	4	3.64
40	I want this course to focus on skills that are relevant to my studies/work.	0.0	6.1	51.5	39.4	3.0	42.4	3	3.39

41	I want practical material that is relevant to the workplace.	0.0	0.0	54.5	42.4	3.0	45.5	3	3.48
42	The topics in this course should be relevant to real-world situations in my field.	0.0	6.1	45.5	42.4	6.1	48.5	3	3.48
43	I am confident that this ESP course will be beneficial for my future career.	0.0	9.1	42.4	39.4	9.1	48.5	3	3.48

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

Students' expectations of the course were positive. 57.6% agreed or strongly agreed that they hoped the course would help them communicate effectively in their field, and no student disagreed. 48.5% believed that the course would benefit their future career and 48.5% wanted topics relevant to real-world situations in their field, while 45.5% wanted practical, workplace-relevant material and 42.4% wanted the course to focus on skills relevant to their studies or work. The high share of neutral responses suggests, however, that many students had not yet formed clear expectations of what an ESP course could offer.

Environmental situation

Table 8 presents students' perceptions of their learning environment.

Table 8. Environmental and learning situation

No.	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Agree (%)	Mdn	Mean
44	The classroom environment supports the English learning process well.	0.0	3.0	45.5	42.4	9.1	51.5	4	3.58
45	Learning facilities and resources (e.g., LCD projectors, internet, books) are adequate.	0.0	3.0	48.5	39.4	9.1	48.5	3	3.55
46	The English class schedule fits my study time.	0.0	6.1	57.6	33.3	3.0	36.4	3	3.33
47	The duration of each meeting is sufficient to understand the material.	3.0	6.1	48.5	42.4	0.0	42.4	3	3.30
48	I have the opportunity to practice English outside of class.	0.0	6.1	51.5	42.4	0.0	42.4	3	3.36

Note. n = 33. Values are percentages of respondents (one respondent = 3.0%). SD = strongly disagree (1); D = disagree (2); N = neutral (3); A = agree (4); SA = strongly agree (5). Agree = A + SA. Mdn = median. Medians and means were calculated from the frequencies.

The learning environment was generally viewed as adequate. 51.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the classroom environment supports English learning, and 48.5% that learning facilities such as LCD projectors, internet access and books are adequate. Views on

time were more neutral: 42.4% considered the duration of each meeting sufficient and 36.4% felt that the class schedule fitted their study time. 42.4% reported having opportunities to practise English outside class, but most students were neutral, which suggests that such opportunities are not yet used optimally.

Overview and response consistency

Table 9 summarises the responses by section and shows where students' needs were most clearly expressed.

Table 9. Overview of responses by questionnaire section

Section	Items	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Clear needs
Professional information	5	37.6	50.9	11.5	1
Personal background information	10	46.7	47.0	6.4	5
Self-assessed English language proficiency	6	18.7	56.6	24.7	0
Learners' lacks	5	64.2	32.1	3.6	5
Language learning preferences	7	46.3	45.0	8.7	4
Professional communication needs	5	45.5	48.5	6.1	1
Expectations from the ESP course	5	48.5	47.3	4.2	1
Environmental and learning situation	5	44.2	50.3	5.5	1

Note. Percentages are averages across the items in each section. Clear needs = items with at least 50% agreement and a median of 4.

Across the questionnaire, 18 of the 48 items met the criterion for a clearly expressed need (at least 50% agreement and a median of 4). All five lacks items met it, with the highest agreement for difficulty in speaking fluently in academic or professional contexts (69.7%), the need to improve grammar and vocabulary (69.7%), difficulty understanding native speakers (66.7%) and insufficient writing skills (60.6%). Five personal background items, mainly concerning attitudes and motivation, and four learning preference items, concerning simulations, real examples, interactive methods and hands-on practice, also met it. In contrast, no proficiency item did, and only one item in each of the professional information, professional communication, course expectation and environment sections met the criterion. Neutral responses averaged between 32.1% (lacks) and 56.6% (proficiency) per section.

The four pairs of similar items produced consistent results. Agreement was 42.4% for both group work items (items 12 and 27), 54.5% and 57.6% for the two items on communicating in the field (items 9 and 39), and 42.4% and 39.4% for the two items on

technical vocabulary (items 5 and 37). Agreement on grammar was higher when it was framed as a need to improve (69.7%, item 25) than as a difficulty in understanding (54.5%, item 13), but both items met the criterion for a clear need. These results suggest that the responses were broadly consistent.

Discussion

In terms of necessities (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), the students recognised English as important for reading academic texts and expected field-specific vocabulary to be part of their English learning, although they did not yet use English frequently in their studies, and most were neutral about their future professional communication needs. Their lacks were concentrated in productive skills, grammar and vocabulary, and their wants favoured practical, interactive and example-based learning. These necessities, however, are inferred from students' own perceptions. Necessities are, by definition, the demands of the target situation, and the data do not show directly what English early childhood teachers in kindergartens and Raudhatul Athfal actually use. The neutral responses on professional communication may reflect precisely this uncertainty: as studies of kindergarten teachers show, English in early childhood classrooms is often introduced informally, with limited curriculum guidance (Budianto, 2026; Rahayu & Noor Rohmah, 2025), so students may not yet have a clear picture of the English their future work will require.

The large proportion of neutral responses across the questionnaire is itself an important finding. It may reflect students' limited experience of using English in their field, their low confidence in judging their own proficiency, or a tendency to choose the midpoint of the scale. Following Basturkmen (2010), these subjective perceptions should therefore be combined with objective information, such as proficiency tests and analyses of the English that early childhood educators actually need. The findings on learning conditions, which were generally adequate but with limited practice outside class, also support Nation and Macalister's (2010) view that course design must take the learning environment into account.

The findings are broadly consistent with needs analyses of other Indonesian university students. As with public health students, who regarded writing as the most important skill and reported low confidence in grammar (Arroyyani et al., 2022), PIAUD students reported insufficient writing skills and difficulties with grammar. As with midwifery students, who wanted English teaching to emphasise speaking (Hariyanto et al., 2022), speaking fluency was the most frequently reported lack. Unlike students of health programs, whose target situation includes communication with patients and professional discourse (Hidayati &

Meisani, 2023), PIAUD students' professional needs remain less defined, which reflects the less established role of English in Indonesian early childhood education. The strong agreement with statements about difficulties, compared with largely neutral self-ratings, also suggests that future instruments should include reverse-worded items to reduce acquiescent responding.

These findings suggest that an ESP course for PIAUD students should prioritise speaking and writing for academic and professional purposes, integrate vocabulary from early childhood education, and use simulations, real examples and hands-on activities, for example role-plays of classroom interactions with children or parents and the writing of short reports or lesson materials in English. This practical orientation is consistent with Communicative Language Teaching, in which language is learned through meaningful use (Richards, 2006). Such tasks would also address the challenges reported by kindergarten teachers, who lack confidence and child-appropriate strategies for introducing English (Copland et al., 2014; Rahayu & Noor Rohmah, 2025). For the English for STEM course, the same practical orientation could be applied to the language of simple science and mathematics activities, such as giving instructions for an experiment, naming shapes and quantities, and describing what children observe, in line with the growing use of STEAM approaches in Islamic early childhood education (Nadlifah & Latif, 2024). Because the questionnaire did not include STEM-specific items, these course suggestions should be tested in future research.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the English language needs of 33 PIAUD students at UIN Alauddin Makassar. The students hold positive attitudes towards English and recognise its importance for reading academic texts and for learning field-specific vocabulary. Their clearest needs concern productive skills: most reported difficulties in speaking fluently in academic or professional contexts, understanding native speakers and writing reports or academic papers, and wanted to improve their grammar and vocabulary. They prefer simulations, real examples, interactive teaching and hands-on practice. Their self-assessment of proficiency and their views on professional communication were largely neutral, which suggests that they do not yet have a clear picture of the English their future work will require. English instruction for PIAUD students should therefore take an ESP approach that develops speaking and writing through practical tasks related to early childhood education.

The study has several limitations. It involved 33 self-selected students from one batch in one study program, relied on self-reported questionnaire data, and did not report the

reliability or validity of the instrument. All items were worded positively, which may have encouraged acquiescent responding, and some items, such as item 1, combined two contexts (study and work). Necessities were inferred from students' perceptions without data from the target situation. Future research should combine the questionnaire with proficiency tests and interviews, include the perspectives of PIAUD lecturers and early childhood teachers, analyse the English used in kindergartens and Raudhatul Athfal, and include items on the English needed for STEM activities with young children.

AI USE AND DISCLOSURE

State whether generative AI tools were used in preparing this manuscript (e.g., for translation, grammar checking or proofreading), name the tool, and confirm that the authors verified all content and take full responsibility for the article. If no AI tools were used, state this.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT

Participation in the study was voluntary. The students were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire, and their responses were collected and reported anonymously and used only for academic purposes.

CRediT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Alya Sulfani: …; Nur Azizah Sahlia: …; Nurwanita Miftahul Jannah: … (e.g., Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The questionnaire and the anonymised response data are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank the students of the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program, class of 2023, who were willing to be respondents in this research, and Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar for its institutional support and facilities.

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