Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Vol. 6(3), 2026, pp. 35-53

ESP in the AI Era: A Qualitative Study of the Changing English Language Requirements of Economics and Management Students

Khaoula EL Idrissi[1] & Abdelouahd Bouzar[2]

[1,2] University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Fez, Morocco
Correspondence: Khaoula EL Idrissi, University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Morocco
Email: khaoula.elidrissi@usmba.ac.ma

DOI: 10.53103/cjlls.v6i3.276

Abstract

ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot are artificial intelligence (AI) tools that are completely changing how students learn English in higher education. Such change requires the reevaluation of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs to make them relevant to the changing needs of students. This qualitative research explored the perceptions of economics and management students in their sixth semester (S6) at a Moroccan public university regarding their English language requirements in an age of widespread use of AI. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants, and the resulting data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. Four key themes were identified: (a) shifting perceptions of essential language skills in the AI era, (b) the persistent centrality of speaking and professional communication, (c) reconceptualised writing needs in an AI-assisted environment, and (d) discipline-specific English requirements. Results indicated that students felt there had been a change in the order of importance of language skills with mechanical accuracy becoming less important and higher-order cognitive-linguistic skills and oral communication becoming more important. Interestingly, students at the beginner level showed paradoxical reliance on AI tools that can hinder the development of genuine language proficiency. The study posits that AI does not make ESP instruction irrelevant; instead, it requires curricular changes with a focus on oral proficiency, critical writing skills, AI-evaluation skills, discipline-specific language courses, and proficiency-differentiated instruction.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes, Artificial Intelligence, Needs Analysis, Oral Proficiency, Higher Education

Introduction

English language teaching in higher education is facing the most significant change in its history due to the fast development of artificial intelligence tools. Since ChatGPT was publicly launched in November 2022, writing assistants powered by AI have become a ubiquitous part of the academic world, with some recent surveys suggesting that about 86 percent of university students have used AI-based writing assistants in their studies

(Digital Education Council, 2024). This technological revolution has offered both opportunities and challenges to the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching, especially in a situation where English is used as a pathway to professional and academic progress.

In Morocco, English is becoming an increasingly important language in the professional and higher education sectors due to the globalisation processes and the desire of the country to develop economically (Baaqili & Ed-dali, 2024). This tendency is a manifestation of the general trends in situations where the colonial languages have traditionally held a leading role in the educational process (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015). Students of economics and management are specifically pressured to acquire the English language because the globalization of business and finance requires them to communicate in English to succeed in their careers. Nevertheless, the introduction of AI products capable of creating, correcting, and improving written English begs some basic questions as to what English language proficiency is crucial and how ESP programs ought to react to these technological advancements.

Needs analysis has long been a cornerstone ESP course design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Conventional needs analysis models make a distinction between learning needs (what learners need to do to learn) and target needs (what learners need to do in the target situation). Nonetheless, they were conceptualised in the pre-AI age, and may require reconceptualisation to account for how AI tools mediate the use and learning of language. When students have the capability of generating grammatically correct text with the help of ChatGPT or of detecting and automatically correcting mistakes with the help of Grammarly, the longstanding focus on accuracy-based instruction may need to shift toward other competencies.

Although the topic of AI and language learning has become the focus of increasing research (Kasneci et al., 2023; Kohnke, Moorhouse, & Zou, 2023), there is a lack of empirical studies that focus on how the adoption of AI affects the perceived needs of students in English language-specific settings. Moreover, the studies of the North African educational context are limited, which leaves a knowledge gap about how students in this context can navigate the intersection of ESP learning and AI tool use.

In this study, the gap will be filled by exploring the following research questions:

1. What do S6 economics and management students consider as the English language skills that are necessary to support their academic and professional futures in the AI era?

2. What are the effects of using AI tools on the perceptions of students regarding their learning needs in English language?

3. What are the gaps between the present performance of students in English and the perceived target needs?

4. What are the differences in the perceived English language needs of economics

students and management students?

Literature Review

English to Specific Purposes: Theoretical Underpinnings

English for Specific Purposes developed as a distinct field of teaching English in the 1960s due to the understanding that the learners in various fields have specialised language requirements that cannot be effectively met by general English classes (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). The discipline has undergone significant changes since its emergence and shifted its interest to a more generalised comprehension of language in a certain situation (Basturkmen, 2010).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) offered a background framework of ESP that differentiates between variable and absolute characteristics. Absolute characteristics include an emphasis on addressing a particular learner need, the application of sub-methodology and activities of the target disciplines and emphasis on suitable language characteristics. Such characteristics as being restricted to certain disciplines, specialised teaching methodology, adult learner design and intermediate or advanced student targeting are all variable

The modern ESP research is focused on the necessity to study not only the linguistic peculiarities of the target discourse communities but also the social and cultural, as well as cognitive aspects of language usage in the particular professional and academic settings (Basturkmen, 2010). This environmental view of ESP concurs with appeals to think about the impact of technological tools, such as AI, on language practices.

Needs Analysis: Frameworks and Concepts

The analysis of needs is the most significant part of the ESP course design, as it offers the empirical basis of the curriculum design, selection of materials, and pedagogical strategies (Long, 2005). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) made a distinction between target needs and learning needs, and the former was further divided into necessities (what the learners need to know in order to operate in the target situation), lacks (the difference between the actual level of proficiency and the target requirements), and wants (the subjective view of the learners on their needs).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) extended this framework to present situation analysis (PSA), target situation analysis (TSA) and means analysis to offer a more detailed approach to the analysis of the needs of learners, in their own educational and professional context. This multidimensional model recognizes that successful ESP teaching should take into account the goals that learners should reach as well as their present skills, learning styles, and limitations and opportunities of the learning context.

Long (2005) noted the role of triangulation in needs analysis, recommending that

needs be analysed using multiple sources and methods to enhance validity and reliability. Interviews and observations are especially useful as a qualitative method to understand the complexity and contextual nature of learner needs that quantitative measures might be unable to capture.

This paper is based on the needs analysis framework provided by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), and it analyses the target needs and the learning needs in the modern context of language learning mediated by AI.

English Language Requirements in Business and Economics Education

The studies of the English language requirements in business and economics settings have always emphasised the significance of general and specialised language skills. Research has also identified key skill areas, such as academic reading of discipline-specific texts, professional writing (reports, proposals, correspondence), oral presentation skills, and interpersonal communication in the workplace (Evans, 2012; Kassim & Ali, 2010).

Evans (2012) discovered that Hong Kong business graduates rated speaking and listening skills as more significant than reading and writing to achieve workplace success, which contradicts the traditional curriculum focus on written skills. In the same vein, Kassim and Ali (2010) found that oral communication skills were the most important English language competency that Malaysian engineering employers considered to be effective in the workplace.

Recent research in various settings has supported these results and also pointed out the growing significance of English in terms of accessing global knowledge base, engaging in international business communication and professional progression in globalised economies. Nevertheless, these studies predate the widespread adoption of AI writing tools, which means that new research is needed on how technological changes can be transforming the perceived requirements.

Language Learning with Artificial Intelligence

The introduction of AI tools in language learning is one of the most significant developments in educational technology. Kasneci et al. (2023) have provided an in-depth discussion of the implications of ChatGPT in education, both opportunities (personalised feedback, writing assistance, language practice) and challenges (academic integrity concerns, potential over-reliance, accuracy issues). The authors cautioned that the uncritical application of AI tools may have a detrimental impact on the process of critical thinking and writing independently.

The studies that specifically analyzed the use of AI tools in the context of language learning have provided mixed results. Yan (2023) explored the effects of ChatGPT on L2

writing practicum students and discovered that students enjoyed the immediate feedback and language assistance, but there were concerns about dependency and a lack of interest in the writing process. Kohnke et al. (2023) investigated the affordances of ChatGPT in language teaching and learning and observed that it could provide explanations, examples, and practice opportunities but was limited in accuracy and contextual appropriateness.

Studies of AI writing assistants such as Grammarly have mostly found positive outcomes on surface accuracy and questioned more profound learning outcomes. According to Fitria (2021), Grammarly promoted more active revision among EFL students but that the use of automated feedback could decrease the development of self-editing skills in students.

The Changing Language Requirements in the Age of AI

The advent of AI-driven text-generating software, which can produce text that mimics a human, is capable of correcting mistakes, and even writing academic papers, poses some fundamental questions as to what language skills are uniquely human and thus valuable to learn. Chan (2023) has suggested an overall AI policy framework in education, where students are to be taught to critically evaluate AI-generated content and learn the strengths and weaknesses of AI tools.

Recent studies indicate that text editing and critical assessment as well as the capacity to enhance AI-generated text might gain greater significance than text creation in an AI-mediated environment (Kasneci et al., 2023). Likewise, oral communication skills, which AI cannot reproduce in real-time interpersonal situations, can become more prominent as written communication is more AI-assisted. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of empirical studies investigating the perceptions of students themselves regarding these changing dynamics, especially in ESP settings where the requirements of discipline-specific language use are in conflict with the general academic and professional communication demands. This paper fills this gap by qualitatively examining the perceptions of economics and management students about their English language requirements in the context of their use of AI tools.

Methodology

Research Design

The research falls within an interpretivist paradigm, according to which the reality is socially constructed and the meaning is formed by subjective interpretation of experiences by individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research, therefore, used a qualitative descriptive design, which is an attempt to give a detailed overview of phenomena in practical language (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method was chosen because it is appropriate in investigating the perceptions, experiences, and interpretations

of the participants, which are the key issues of this study. Qualitative description enables the researcher to remain close to the data as well as to the words of participants and yet be involved in interpretation and meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the role of the researchers concerning the phenomenon under study needs to be transparent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first author, who conducted all interviews and data analysis, is an English language instructor at the Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taza. This insider status provided a level of familiarity with the educational situation and made it easier to connect with the participants, but it also required a high level of reflexivity to assumptions and biases. Reflexive journaling was used by the first author during data collection and analysis to record the new meanings, confront assumptions, and make sure that the results were based on the voices of the participants and not on the expectations of the instructor. The second author ensured critical supervision during the analysis stage and examined emerging themes to improve on confirmability. To minimise the influence of power dynamics, the participants were promised that their answers would not influence their grades and that the role of the interviewer during the interviews was that of a student who wanted to learn about their experiences.

Research Context

The study was conducted at the Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taza, a public higher education institution in Taza, Morocco. The faculty provides undergraduate courses in economics and management, with English as a mandatory subject across multiple semesters. Students receive 2-3 hours of English instruction per week, combining general English with discipline-specific language tailored to their fields. English language courses are taught in English, whereas other disciplinary courses are taught in French.

Participants

The selection of participants was based on purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), namely, maximum variation sampling, which was used to obtain a wide range of viewpoints on the phenomena of interest. The sample used consisted of 16 sixth-semester (S6) students (8 in the economics programme and 8 in the management programme). This sample size is consistent with qualitative research recommendations of thematic saturation, as Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) discovered that saturation generally happens in the first 12-15 interviews in comparatively homogeneous samples. The criteria were: (a) enrolment in S6 of economics or management programmes, (b) self-reported use of at least

one AI tool in writing English, (c) willingness to take part in an interview of about 45 minutes, and (d) speaking English, French, or Arabic. The greatest variation was desired in terms of gender, self-reported proficiency in English (between beginner and intermediate), and the types of AI tools used.

Table 1 presents participant demographics using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Programme	Gender	Self-Reported Proficiency	AI Tools Used
Ahmed	Economics	Male	Intermediate	ChatGPT, Grammarly
Fatima	Economics	Female	Intermediate	ChatGPT, QuillBot
Youssef	Economics	Male	Lower-intermediate	ChatGPT
Nadia	Economics	Female	Intermediate	Grammarly, ChatGPT
Karim	Economics	Male	Beginner	ChatGPT, Google Translate
Leila	Economics	Female	Lower-intermediate	ChatGPT, Grammarly
Omar	Economics	Male	Intermediate	ChatGPT
Salma	Economics	Female	Intermediate	QuillBot, Grammarly
Hassan	Management	Male	Beginner	ChatGPT
Amina	Management	Female	Intermediate	ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot
Rachid	Management	Male	Lower-intermediate	ChatGPT

Pseudonym	Programme	Gender	Self-Reported Proficiency	AI Tools Used
Khadija	Management	Female	Intermediate	Grammarly
Mehdi	Management	Male	Intermediate	ChatGPT, Grammarly
Sara	Management	Female	Beginner	ChatGPT, Google Translate
Yassine	Management	Male	Intermediate	ChatGPT, QuillBot
Houda	Management	Female	Beginner	ChatGPT, Grammarly

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were carried out between January and February 2026 to collect data. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was designed on the needs analysis framework of Hutchinson and Waters (1987) but with some modifications to include questions on the use of AI tools and its impact on perceived needs. The protocol covered: (a) the use and self-assessment of English language proficiency, (b) the practices and purposes of using AI tools, (c) the perceived target needs in academic and professional settings, (d) the perceived gaps between the current abilities and target needs, and (e) preferences regarding the content and methodology of ESP courses. The first author conducted interviews in the language preferred by the participants (English, French, or Arabic) to make them feel comfortable and express deeply, as is recommended in multilingual research settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The duration of interviews ranged between 35 and 50 minutes and was audio-taped with the consent of the participants. Transcription of all interviews was done verbatim and where needed, translated into English by the first author and checked by a bilingual colleague.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was conducted in accordance with the six-phase process of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) reflexive thematic analysis: (a) familiarisation with data through repeated reading, (b) systematic coding of all data, (c) creation of initial themes through collating codes, (d) review of themes against coded extracts and full dataset, (e)

defining and naming of themes, (f) producing the final analysis report. An inductive approach was adopted, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories.

The coding process was managed using NVivo 14 software that helped to conduct a systematic analysis of the dataset. The first coding produced 247 codes that were later collapsed and grouped into four broad themes and several subthemes through the process of reviewing and refining.

Trustworthiness

Reliability was achieved by several measures that were in line with the requirements of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Member checking was used to improve credibility, whereby interview summaries were provided to the participants to verify them, and triangulation of views between the two groups of students. The transferability was facilitated by the thick description of the research setting and participants. Dependability was addressed by ensuring that a detailed audit trail was kept to record all the analytical decisions. Reflexive journaling and the use of long participant quotes enhanced confirmability as it anchored interpretations on the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Polydisciplinary Faculty of Taza. Informed consent was obtained from all participants following comprehensive information on the purpose of the study, procedures, and rights. The participation was voluntary, with the participants clearly being told of their right to withdraw at any time without any explanation or repercussion to their academic status. Confidentiality was ensured by assigning pseudonyms and transcripts and reports were stripped of all identifying information. No major risks were expected, but the participants were guaranteed that any form of discomfort in the interview could be managed by ending the interview. All audio-tapes and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected computer that will only be available to the researchers and will be destroyed five years after publication.

Findings

Analysis of interview data revealed four major themes: (a) shifting perceptions of essential language skills in the AI era, (b) the persistent centrality of speaking and professional communication, (c) reconceptualised writing needs in an AI-assisted environment, and (d) discipline-specific English requirements. Each theme is elaborated below with supporting evidence from participant narratives.

Theme 1: Shifting Perceptions of Essential Language Skills

The participants repeatedly reported a perceived shift in which English language skills they considered most important, and the availability of AI tools had a role in those perceptions. This theme comprised three sub-themes: the declining importance of mechanical accuracy, the rising premium on higher-order skills, and the paradoxical challenges faced by beginner-level students.

Declining Importance of Mechanical Accuracy

Several respondents said that the old-fashioned issues of grammar, spelling, and simple accuracy were no longer important because AI tools could automatically correct them. Ahmed, a student of economics of intermediate level, expressed this point of view: "Before ChatGPT, I spent so much time worrying about grammar mistakes, verb tenses, articles. Now I write my ideas and ChatGPT fixes the grammar. So grammar is still important to understand, but it's not the most critical skill anymore."

Khadija, a student of management, shared this opinion and mentioned the change in her learning priorities: “Grammarly corrects my mistakes immediately, so I do not need to memorise grammar rules and focus on conveying my thoughts in a clear way. The AI takes care of minor mistakes.” These reactions indicate that AI tools are transforming the way students think about the relative significance of accuracy, releasing cognitive resources to meaning-oriented communication.

Rising Premium on Higher-Order Skills

Alongside the perceived decreasing significance of mechanical accuracy, respondents also highlighted the increasing significance of those skills that can be hardly replicated or substituted by AI tools. The critical thinking, analysis, and the possibility to analyze information turned out to be especially relevant. Nadia, a student of economics, said: “The AI can generate a paragraph, but will it be able to explain why some social groups are more vulnerable to inflation than others are? Is it able to think critically in economic policy? No. So the abilities that render us useful are the human abilities- analysis, critical thinking, and making judgments”.

Mehdi from management offered a complementary perspective focused on professional contexts: “Anyone can use ChatGPT to write an email in business, but it takes human intelligence to understand the strategy, read between the lines, make decisions, and so on.” Respondents therefore positioned higher-order cognitive capabilities as distinctly human assets, valued precisely because AI handles routine linguistic tasks.

The Beginner's Dilemma: AI Dependency and Skill Development

One of the most interesting tendencies was noted in the participants of the beginner level proficiency that demonstrated a paradox: the participants with the lowest level of English skills relied on AI the most, which can impede the process of developing the authentic language.

Houda, a management student who described herself as a beginner, described her experience with AI tools: “Frankly speaking, I am unable to compose even a single sentence without ChatGPT. My English is extremely poor, and I write in Arabic or French, and ChatGPT translates and corrects everything. I know it is not a good method of learning but I have no other choice; my assignments are to be written in good English”.

Sara, another beginner-level management student, expressed the same worries: “I use ChatGPT to do everything. Sometimes I do not even bother to write something myself; I just tell ChatGPT what I want to say. My English is not improving because ChatGPT does everything.” Such descriptions demonstrate a vicious circle: low proficiency results in high dependence on AI, which may not be able to facilitate the engagement of actual language learning processes, which in turn can result in low proficiency. Thus, this cycle needs to be resolved with particular pedagogical solutions.

Theme 2: The Persistent Centrality of Speaking and Professional Communication

Although AI has a transformative effect on written communication, speaking and oral communication were the most urgent needs of the English language identified by the participants. Speaking was identified by 14 of the 16 participants as their main skill gap, and this focus was maintained among economics and management students and all levels of proficiency.

Speaking as the Primary Gap

Respondents often compared their capacity to generate written English (with the help of AI) with their difficulties in oral communication situations. Yousef, a lower-intermediate student of economics, described this gap: “I am able to write a good report since ChatGPT can help me. But in oral exam? Calamity. I am unable to think fast, I lose words, I make grammatical mistakes because there is no AI to help me in real-time. Speaking is my greatest weakness.”

Even more severe difficulties were reported by Karim, a student of economics at the beginning level: “My nightmare is speaking English. I can read slowly when I read, but when someone talks to me, I panic. I cannot speak. My mouth is not functioning. It is okay to write using ChatGPT, but I do not have anything to say”.

The case of Karim demonstrates beginner-level students face increasingly compounded challenges when speaking, and AI offers no support, leaving underlying skill gaps most exposed.

Professional Communication Contexts

The participants related their speaking requirements to the expected professional situations, explaining the situations when oral English proficiency would be necessary. Hassan, a management student of the beginner level, elaborated: "I would like to work in an organization, maybe foreign. I cannot use ChatGPT in meetings, job interviews, speaking with clients. I have to speak myself, and this is what I need most, and this is what I am the worst at."

Amina, a management student, explained the difference between what AI can and cannot do: "In my future career, I will have to negotiate with clients, persuade my manager, read between the lines when people talk, and so on. These are human skills, and ChatGPT cannot sit at a meeting and read the atmosphere, so speaking, understanding culture, building relationships are more important than ever."

The focus of the participants on the context of professional speaking highlights the inability of AI tools to replace the real-time oral communication, which is the field where AI tools do not provide any alternatives at the moment.

Theme 3: Reconceptualised Writing Needs

While AI tools have transformed participants' approach to writing, they did not eliminate writing-related needs. Instead, the nature of perceived writing needs had shifted toward more complex competencies than simple accuracy.

Beyond Grammar: Argumentation and Critical Writing

Respondents acknowledged that AI was capable of making surface-level corrections but not replace higher-level writing skills. Fatima, a student of economics with intermediate level and postgraduate ambitions, reported: "ChatGPT can correct my grammar and propose vocabulary, but not construct my argument. When I write about economic analysis, I have to create logical arguments, apply evidence properly, demonstrate critical thinking. This is what I still have to learn."

Salma, also from economics, discussed the writing requirements of the discipline: "In economics, we must write accurately about numbers, trends, comparisons. ChatGPT can sometimes provide me with text that reads well but does not fit the economic writing style. I must learn how economists write and argue." These reactions suggest that although AI can do mechanical editing, the intellectual structure of academic writing, including

argumentation, use of evidence, and disciplinary norms, is a human task that needs specific training.

AI Evaluation and Critical Assessment

A number of participants pointed to a new requirement that might not be covered by traditional ESP curricula: the skill to analyze and critically evaluate AI-generated content. Rachid, a management student, said: “Sometimes ChatGPT provides incorrect information or writes something that does not fit the Moroccan context. I should be able to verify whether what AI writes is correct and appropriate or not. It is a new skill that we should have.”

Although Sara is heavily dependent on AI, she realised this gap: “I know that ChatGPT is not always correct, but frankly speaking, my English is so poor that I cannot always understand when the AI is mistaken. This is a significant issue. I should learn English to be able to check what ChatGPT writes on my behalf.”

The commentary of Sara shows a crucial problem of the students of the beginner level: the lack of skills to assess the work of AI makes them vulnerable to the possibility of relying on the potentially inaccurate AI without the ability to detect mistakes.

Theme 4: Discipline-Specific English Requirements

There were evident differences between the students of economics and management in terms of their particular needs in the English language as the discourse communities and the professional contexts of the two disciplines are different.

Economics Students: Technical Precision and Academic Access

Students of economics focused on the needs associated with access to English-language academic materials and the ability to convey quantitative ideas in a precise manner. Fatima described: “To proceed to a master's degree or a PhD, I have to read English journals, learn economic theories in English. This is not merely a matter of communication, but of access to knowledge.”

Omar highlighted the need for precise quantitative expression: “In economics, we deal with data, statistics, graphs. I must be able to explain trends correctly: the inflation rate rose by 2.3 percentage points or GDP growth slowed in the third quarter. This exact language is necessary but challenging.” Students of economics thereby made English a portal to disciplinary knowledge and a means of accurate technical communication and not just a medium of general communication.

Management Students: Interpersonal and Genre-Specific Communication

Management students, on the contrary, were concerned with the skills of interpersonal communication and the possibility to write business documents. Amina explained, "In management, everything is about relationships. I require English to network, create relationships with clients, work in multicultural teams. It is not only about proper English but also about proper English in various situations."

Yassine, focusing on specific professional genres, said, "I have to write professional emails, meeting notes, project proposals. They all have their own format and language, and ChatGPT can assist me, but I have to learn these genres myself to use them effectively."

The responses of management students point to the social and genre-specific aspects of their English requirements, with interpersonal effectiveness and situational appropriateness being more important than technical accuracy.

Discussion

Shifting Skill Hierarchies and Curriculum Implications

The results show that there is a perceived restructuring of the English language skill hierarchy among students who frequently use AI tools. Mechanical accuracy, traditionally a primary focus of language instruction, has been demoted to a lower-priority concern that can be left to technology. This change is consistent with the new theoretical approaches that propose that AI will not alter the requirements of language skills, but their relative significance and the way they are acquired (Kasneci et al., 2023).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) theorised needs as dynamic and contextual. The current results indicate that technological context has become a key determinant of needs perceptions. The effective needs of students in AI-rich settings can be truly different from those of students without such access, and thus require differentiated curricular responses. The conclusion that the trends of AI dependency among students of the beginning level are paradoxical is significant. Although intermediate students can apply AI as a scaffold to facilitate further learning, beginners can get stuck in loops where AI replaces, instead of facilitates, language development. This implies that the level of proficiency should be taken into account when incorporating AI into ESP teaching, and novices may need more guided, restricted AI application and more emphasis on the basic skills.

The Irreducible Importance of Oral Communication

The excessive focus on speaking needs in both groups of students validates and expands on the prior studies that have found oral communication to be a significant gap in ESP situations (Evans, 2012; Kassim & Ali, 2010). It is worth noting that the participants

The recurring nature of the professional speaking situations, which include interviews, meetings, negotiations, presentations, shows that ESP curricula must focus on the authentic oral communication practice that equips students with these particular situations. The conventional grammar-based teaching that consumes a lot of curriculum time may be partially shifted to intensive speaking.

From Accuracy to AI-Augmented Writing Competence

The re-conceptualisation of writing requirements is an important discovery that has direct curricular implications. The fact that students are more focused on argumentation, critical thinking, and discipline-specific conventions than on grammar and mechanics implies that writing instruction should also change its focus. Instead of devoting substantial instructional time to error correction, which AI can handle, teaching can focus on rhetorical strategies, use of evidence, conventions of disciplinary genres, and argument construction. Furthermore, the development of AI evaluation as a perceived requirement implies a new competency area of ESP curricula: critical AI literacy. Students should be able to not only effectively use AI tools but also analyze AI output to determine its accuracy, suitability, and relevance. This represents an extension of classical critical literacy frameworks into the AI domain.

Discipline-Specific Needs and Modular Curriculum Design

The distinctiveness of the needs of economics and management students justifies the need to teach ESP in a discipline-specific manner, as opposed to generic business English strategies. The focus on academic reading, quantitative accuracy, and access to disciplinary knowledge among economics students implies that their needs are similar to those of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in their discipline. The emphasis of management students on interpersonal communication and business genres implies that their needs are more oriented towards professional communication and business English. These disparities support the idea of modular curriculum design that meets common underlying needs and offers discipline-specific elements that meet the unique needs of each group of students.

Conclusion

This research examined the perceptions of students of economics and management at a Moroccan university regarding their English language requirements in the age of the popularity of AI tools. The results indicate that AI is not making English language skills irrelevant but is instead altering the ranking of competencies that are valued. Mechanical accuracy has lost its perceived significance, whereas speaking, critical thinking,

argumentation, and discipline-specific language skills have become salient.

One of the most noteworthy discoveries is the differential effect of AI depending on proficiency levels. Although the intermediate-level students can use AI resources to facilitate further language acquisition, those at the beginner levels might adopt undesirable dependency habits that hinder the development of authentic language competence. This observation makes a case in favor of proficiency-based methods of AI integration in ESP teaching.

The practical implications for ESP curriculum design are substantial. The programmes must take into account: (a) less focus on grammar teaching and more oral communication practice, (b) redesigning writing teaching to focus on argumentation, genre conventions, and AI assessment skills, (c) creating discipline-specific modules that meet the unique needs of students in economics and management, (d) introducing the critical AI literacy as a new core competency, and (e) implementing proficiency-differentiated AI integration strategies to address the beginner dependency dilemma.

This study's limitations include its focus on a single institution and reliance on self-reported data. Further studies could use observational approaches to study real practices of AI usage, longitudinal research to trace the development of the needs perception over the period of AI proficiency, and research on the attitude of the instructors to curricular adaptation. Comparative analysis at various levels of proficiency using bigger sample sizes would also enlighten the dilemma of the beginner as discovered in this study.

With the continued development of AI tools, it will be necessary to conduct an ongoing needs analysis to keep ESP curricula up-to-date with the evolving needs of students. The current research provides a picture of perceptions of needs at a specific point in the history of the AI revolution, which will be added to an evidence base that will need to evolve along with the technology itself.

Author Contributions: Khaoula EL Idrissi conceptualised the study, collected data, conducted interviews, performed thematic analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Abdelouahad Bouzar contributed to the research design, reviewed the analysis, and critically revised the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability: Interview transcripts are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality but may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank the participants for generously sharing their experiences and perspectives.

References

Baaqili, M., & Ed-dali, R. (2024). The escalation of English in Morocco: From the blue to the breakthrough. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 11(10), 124–137. doi:10.46827/ejes.v11i10.5558

Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing courses in English for Specific Purposes*. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230290518

Belhiah, H., & Elhami, M. (2015). English as a medium of instruction in the Gulf: When students and teachers speak. *Language Policy*, 14(1), 3–23. doi:10.1007/s10993-014-9336-9

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. doi:10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Chan, C. K. Y. (2023). A comprehensive AI policy education framework for university teaching and learning. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 20, Article 38. doi:10.1186/s41239-023-00408-3

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Digital Education Council. (2024). *Global AI student survey 2024*. Retrieved from https://www.digitaleducationcouncil.com/post/digital-education-council-global-ai-student-survey-2024

Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Evans, S. (2012). Designing email tasks for the business English classroom: Implications from a study of Hong Kong's key industries. *English for Specific Purposes*, 31(3), 202–212. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2012.03.001

Fitria, T. N. (2021). Grammarly as AI-powered English writing assistant: Students' alternative for writing English. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, 5(1), 65–78. doi:10.31002/metathesis.v5i1.3519

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. doi:10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Kasneci, E., Seßler, K., Küchemann, S., Bannert, M., Dementieva, D., Fischer, F., . . . Kasneci, G. (2023). ChatGPT for good? On opportunities and challenges of large

language models for education. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 103, Article 102274. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102274

Kassim, H., & Ali, F. (2010). English communicative events and skills needed at the workplace: Feedback from the industry. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(3), 168–182. doi:10.1016/j.esp.2009.10.002

Kohnke, L., Moorhouse, B. L., & Zou, D. (2023). ChatGPT for language teaching and learning. *RELC Journal*, 54(2), 537–550. doi:10.1177/00336882231162868

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Long, M. H. (Ed.). (2005). *Second language needs analysis*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511667299

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yan, D. (2023). Impact of ChatGPT on learners in a L2 writing practicum: An exploratory investigation. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29, 2151–2181. doi:10.1007/s10639-023-11742-4

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Opening

1. Please tell me about yourself and your experience in learning English.
2. How would you describe your current English proficiency level?

AI Tool Use

3. What AI tools do you use for English writing (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly, QuillBot)?
4. How often and for what purposes do you use these tools?
5. How has using AI tools changed the way you approach English writing?

Target Needs

6. What do you think you will need English for in your future career?
7. What English language skills do you think are most important for economics/management professionals?

Present Situation and Lacks

8. How do you rate your current English abilities in different skill areas (speaking, writing, reading, listening)?
9. What are your biggest challenges or weaknesses in English?
10. What is the gap between your current abilities and what you need?

Learning Needs and Wants

11. How do you think your English courses should change to better prepare you?
12. What topics or skills should be given more attention in your English classes?
13. In your opinion, how should AI tools be integrated into English learning?

Closing

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your English language needs or experiences with AI tools?
15. Do you have any questions for me?